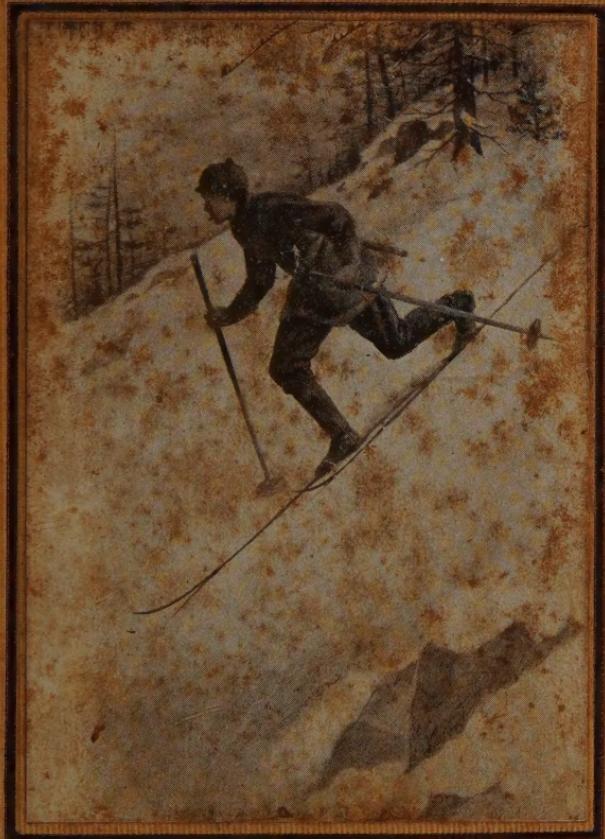


PEANUT - CUB REPORTER



WALTER P. EATON

Peanut—Cub Reporter

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Walter P. Eaton

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Peanut—Cub Reporter

A BOY SCOUT'S LIFE AND ADVENTURES ON A NEWSPAPER

By

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK T. MERRILL



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BOSTON CHICAGO

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PEANUT—CUB REPORTER

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Made in United States of America

To

*the Members of The Fourth Estate
who labor with an often unappre-
ciated devotion to give us the news
and to keep our Institutions Free*

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Peanut—Cub Reporter

CHAPTER I

PEANUT'S FIRST DAY IN THE *HERALD* OFFICE

IT was half-past seven o'clock of a Monday morning, the last week in March, that Peanut Morrison, nineteen years old, going on twenty, until the Saturday before Scout Master of the Wildcat Patrol of Southmead Boy Scouts, walked into the office of the Hampton *Herald*, to begin his new life as a reporter.

He had a grin on his face, and he walked easily, even with the hint of a swagger.

That was because he didn't feel a bit like grinning, and actually his knees were wabbling. He felt as if his breakfast were a lump of lead in his stomach, and likely to come up any minute and bump the roof of his mouth.

But you mustn't think Peanut was afraid. It wasn't because he was afraid that he felt so, but because he was so excited at his new job, and so tense and nervous with imagining how he was going to act when he got his first assignment. (Assignment

is the name given in a newspaper office to any job the editor hands the reporter to do. The reporter is "assigned" to "cover" a baseball game, for instance. But we shall explain all the newspaper terms more at length as they come into the story.)

"What will my first assignment be?" Peanut was wondering. "And how will I get away with it? What if I shouldn't do the job right?"

The office of the *Herald* (which was an afternoon paper) was in a dingy brick building a few steps down a side street, in the city of Hampton. The city itself would seem to a boy who lives in New York or Chicago or Philadelphia more like a village than a city, for it had only thirty-five or forty thousand inhabitants, and nearly all the stores and hotels were on one long main street, just as they are in a village. It was even called Main Street. But to Peanut, who had been born and brought up in Southmead, where the fields and woods came up to the back yards, Hampton seemed a very big and strange place, full of bustle and excitement, and the dingy brick building where the *Herald* was printed, though it was only three stories high, opened the portal of romance to him, as he climbed the steps and entered.

The door opened into a front room which was the business office. This room had counters like a bank, and a big safe in the corner. Here the adver-

tisements and subscriptions were taken, and the accounts kept. Peanut passed through this room by a narrow passage into a big room at the rear, which was full of desks and typewriters, with two or three telephone booths in one corner, and in another corner a little room fenced off by a thin partition where the managing editor had his office. Over the different desks and typewriters hung electric lights in green shades, suspended from the ceiling by cords. The room was so dingy and dark, and the windows so dirty, that on a dull day, Peanut realized, these lights would be necessary. The place was saturated with a curious smell, in part stale tobacco smoke, in part something Peanut could not place, but which he afterward came to know was compounded of printer's ink and hot type matrixes. A newspaper is not printed directly from type. The type is set up into a page, and then a sheet of prepared wet paper pulp, like a very thick piece of blotting paper, is squeezed down over it, making a mould or matrix. Into this mould hot metal is poured, and when it cools you have the whole page all in one solid piece. This piece is then bent around a cylinder on the press, and the printing is done from that, while the type is being melted and used over again. When the hot metal is poured into the damp mould, a stinging smell results which permeates the whole building.

Certainly the office of the *Herald* was not a very neat or cheerful place. But to Peanut it was the goal of his dreams, and he didn't question anything. He even sniffed the odor with pleasure, and looked about for somebody to report to.

He had been told to come at half-past seven, but nobody was in the big room except a man over by a telegraph instrument, and one other man, at a large, flat desk, sharpening several blue pencils, and laying them in a row beside him. The man at the telegraph instrument had a typewriter, too, and as the instrument clicked he seemed to be taking down on this typewriter what was being sent in over the wire. The man sharpening pencils glanced up at Peanut, and said, "Well?"

"I—I'm a new reporter. They told me to come at 7:30," said Peanut.

The man grinned. "I'll tell 'em you got here," he answered. "Sit down and catch an early worm."

He went on sharpening pencils.

Presently the telegraph instrument stopped, and the man who had been typing pulled the sheet out of his machine and passed it over to the pencil sharpener.

"Another revolution in Mexico," said he. "Might as well have a standing head set for that yarn!"

The other man took one of his blue pencils, and

began to mark this sheet of copy. Presently he banged ■ call bell on the desk, but nobody appeared.

"Drat that boy," he cried. "Here, new reporter, think you can find the composing room? Shoot this out through that door, will you? The tube's bust to-day. Go up the iron stairs, and have a look around."

Peanut took the copy, which had head-lines written over it with the blue pencil, and went out through the rear door, and up a flight of iron stairs, to the next floor, where he found another big room full of typesetting machines. He gave the copy to a man who seemed to be the foreman, and stayed to watch it set up. One operator took the heading, to set in large type by hand. Another took the text, and propping it in a rack on the machine in front of him, over a keyboard much like a big typewriter keyboard, began to work this keyboard just as you work a typewriter. Off at one side of the big machine was a pot of molten type metal, and each time the man hit a letter an arm of the machine dropped a little die into a slot, till a line the width of a newspaper column had been made, and then this line of dies dropped down and stamped a line of molten metal, which flowed into place. That is why this mechanical typesetter is called a linotype machine—it sets a line of type at a time. The man working it

could thus set up type as fast as a girl can run a typewriter. Peanut was so fascinated watching that he forgot for ten minutes to go back to the editorial room.

When he did get back there, two or three more men had arrived, including the managing editor, James Sawyer, who had engaged him the week before. Mr. Sawyer was a thin, tall, smooth-shaven man of about forty-five, who didn't talk much, but when he did talk usually said something sarcastic. He was known in the office as "Old J. S." because he signed all orders with his initials. Peanut felt it was his duty to report at once, so he went up to the entrance of the little compartment partitioned off from the big room, and knocked on the door frame, for the door was wide open.

J. S. looked up, and saw who was there. "Oh, Morrison, eh," said he, in a kindly tone. "Come in."

"I came to report," said Peanut, "and find out what I was to do first."

J. S. smiled faintly. "I guess the first thing you'll do is learn to run a typewriter—unless you know how already?"

"No," Peanut admitted, "I don't."

"And while you're learning to run it," the editor continued, "you might keep your eyes and ears open, and catch on to the way things are done

here. That's known as getting into the newspaper atmosphere."

J. S. went to his door and called, "Oh, Cooley—come here."

A young man of about thirty got up from a desk and came into the office.

"Cooley, this is Morrison, a new reporter," said J. S. "He's the Boy Scout who's been covering Southmead items for us. Take him in tow, will you? Give him a desk and a machine, and start him learning to use it. You might give him a few heads to practice on later in the day."

J. S. turned abruptly to his own desk, picked up a Boston morning paper, and immediately forgot Peanut.

"Come on, kid," said Cooley.

He led Peanut out to a desk, which had a typewriter fastened to it in such a way that the machine could be pushed down out of sight and covered up when not in use.

"This was Jim Field's desk," said Cooley. "You can have it now."

"What's become of him?" Peanut asked.

"He got too good for us—went to New York. He's on the *Tribune* now, I believe," said the other man.

"That's where I want to go, some day—New York," Peanut declared.

Cooley laughed. "We all do," said he. "But somebody's got to stay at home. You wouldn't get any skiing in New York," he added.

"You read my story?" Peanut couldn't refrain from the question. (It was Peanut's story about skiing which had helped to get him his job on the *Herald*.)

"I had to," Cooley answered. "I had to write the head for it."

He now took a piece of yellow copy paper, showed Peanut how to put it into the typewriter, and sitting down before it wrote quickly the following line —

*"Now is the time for all good men to
come to the aid of the party."*

"Why do you write that?" Peanut asked.

"Nobody knows," said Cooley. "But that's the line you always write when you are learning. It's a sacred tradition. You couldn't learn on any other line. Now, you try it. You can make up some new poetry after you get the hang of that."

Cooley went away, and left Peanut alone. The reporters with desks near his spoke to him, introducing themselves pleasantly. But they soon went out on assignments. The telegraph instruments were clicking noisily. The "inside man," as the reporter was called who stayed in the office, kept answering the 'phone and taking stories that way.

Cooley and the man who had been sharpening pencils when Peanut arrived were busy writing heads. The exchange editor sat at a desk with a pile of papers in front of him, and cut out clippings, which Peanut later learned were sometimes used as if they were special despatches to the *Herald*—a trick he never thought was square, as, indeed, it isn't.

Peanut, slowly, with much labor, learned to write—

*“Now is the time for all good men to
come to the aid of the party.”*

He kept at this line till he could write it fairly rapidly. Then he began writing his own name, and other names. He found himself writing the names of all the boys in his Wildcat Patrol, and that made him homesick, so he switched off to the states of the Union. Finally, as his fingers began to get used to the keyboard, he began inventing a story about a big four alarm fire. He kept at this till nearly noon. Everybody in the office seemed to have forgotten his existence. The reporters were coming back, one by one, and sitting down to their machines to write. The telephones were ringing. The afternoon *Herald* was being filled up with copy—and Peanut was not doing ■ thing to help. He couldn't quite ~~see~~ where he came in at all.

At noon Cooley looked up. "Better get ~~some~~ lunch, Morrison," he said.

"Yes, I've worked so hard I'm hungry," Peanut replied.

Cooley grinned. "Don't worry, you'll work hard enough before we're through with you!" he said.

Peanut went out to a lunch room and returned in half an hour to find the office busier than ever. It was the hour before the first edition went to press, and everybody was working intensely. Overhead the rumble of the wheel tables could be heard as the pages in the composing room were wheeled to the room where the matrixes were made. Every now and then a shrill screeching sound smote the ear, which Peanut later learned came from a circular saw cutting smooth the edges of the stereotyped forms. J. S. kept coming out of his office with sheets of proof in his hands, and giving orders. Cooley kept running up to the composing room to look after the "make up"—that is, to tell the men there what stories to put on each page, what to put at the top of the column, and so on. Of course, on a newspaper, it is very important to have the best stories on the front page, and, among the short stories, to have the most interesting near the top of the columns, or where they will be most prominent. And there isn't much time to do all this in, Peanut realized. Most of the reporters didn't get in with

their stories till toward noon, and it took them another hour to write what they'd gathered, and then it had to be set up, and placed on the page, and the page stereotyped from the matrix, and the stereotyped plates fastened on the cylinders of the presses in the basement, and then printed, all in time to catch the three o'clock train out of Hampton. No wonder everybody was busy. Of course, there was a later edition just for the city, after this first one.

Peanut went back to his desk feeling quite useless, and began to practise on his typewriter again. After a while he suddenly heard a new noise. The building seemed to rumble. The floor trembled a little. The reporter next to him looked over at the clock, and sighed.

"There she goes to bed!" said he. "Gosh, I'm hungry!" And he picked up his hat.

"What do you mean, go to bed?" Peanut plucked up courage to ask.

"That's what we say when the presses start—the paper's gone to bed," the reporter answered. "If she doesn't go to bed on time, you can bet old J. S. comes out to see what's the matter with the nurse—and then, duck for the bomb-proof!"

With the rumble of the presses, Peanut could feel the tenseness of the office grow noticeably less. Men relaxed. Some of them went out to lunch.

Those who remained, working on stories for the second edition, which circulated only in the city, were nearly through, and taking it easy. A few moments later an office boy, with a pile of papers, still damp with ink, came up from the press room, and began to toss them on the desks. The reporters all grabbed their copies and began to scan them, no doubt to see what had happened to their stories. But Peanut had no story in the paper. He felt small and insignificant, and let his copy lie unopened on his desk.

Five minutes later J. S. poked his head out of his cubby-hole, smoking a corn-cob pipe, and looked about. He saw Peanut and came over to the boy's desk.

"Well, you're getting on," he said, as Peanut was thumping away at his typewriter. "Come here, Bill," he added, to a young reporter near by.

"Bill," he said, when the reporter had drawn near, "this is Morrison, a new man. Cut two or three number fourteen stories out of yesterday's paper, cut off the heads, and show Morrison how to write 'em. What's your name, Morrison, by the way?"

"Why—it's—it's ——"

"Don't you know your name?"

"Yes, sir," Peanut grinned, "but I've been called Peanut so long I'd most forgot it. It's Robert."

"Peanut, eh?" J. S. laughed. "You look fairly husky now. But the peanut is a good fruit—if it's roasted enough."

He went away, leaving Peanut in the care of Bill Judd, a reporter not many years older than Peanut himself.

"You're the chap that wrote the ski piece for our Saturday paper, aren't you?" Bill asked him. "Good stuff. You won't be a cub long, I guess. Now we'll try those heads."

Peanut liked his new instructor. He was a fine, clean-looking young man, who spoke quietly and reminded Peanut of Rob Evarts back in Southmead, and the friends Rob used to bring home from college to visit him. The reporter now showed Peanut how many letters could go into a line for a number fourteen head, and told him that the head should tell as briefly as possible what the story was about, and also tell it in such a way that it would make the reader want to go on and read the whole story. "It's quite an art, writing heads," he said; "it's both a Chinese puzzle to get the letters in right, and a literary stunt to make 'em interesting."

Peanut puzzled away for half an hour writing heads for stories in yesterday's paper, and then comparing them with the heads that had actually been used. One was a story about a row in the Board of Aldermen, and Peanut's first line was —

Mexico in the City Hall.

He looked at the real head. It was —

Aldermen in a Wrangle.

“Say, I like my head better,” he said to Bill.

The reporter looked at them both, and laughed. “So do I,” he said. “But you don’t want to get too good at this game, or they’ll soak the job off on you, and you won’t get outside work. It’s no fun sticking in here all day.”

“That’s about all I seem to have done so far,” said Peanut, ruefully.

“Cheer up,” Bill laughed. “J. S. is letting you ‘soak up atmosphere,’ as he calls it.”

One by one the men were going home now. The telegraph instruments had stopped. The presses were rumbling with the final edition. Gradually the office grew vacant. But nobody told Peanut he could go, so he turned to his typewriter again, and began to pick out a letter to his mother. He was busily working at this, when he heard a step behind him.

J. S. had come from his office, with hat and coat on. Everybody else was gone.

“Going to spend the night here?” the managing editor asked.

“Began to look so,” Peanut replied, catching a twinkle in the man’s eye which gave him courage.

"Well, lock up if you go out to supper," J. S. said gravely. "The rest of us prefer to go home when the day's work is over."

Peanut grinned rather sheepishly, and closed his desk. He had supposed he had to stay till he was told he could go. To learn the routine and customs of the office, he realized, was one of the things J. S. had kept him there all day for, doing nothing. He went out into the street with a copy of the *Herald* in his hand, and looked at the Southmead news to see what was going on at home.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ASSIGNMENT

PEANUT'S second day wasn't greatly different from his first. Bill Judd spoke to him pleasantly when he came in, and J. S. nodded to him, but passed by without a word. The boy went to his typewriter and began his practice once more. About ten o'clock, when the inside man was out of the room, the 'phone rang, and Cooley called out, "Answer it, Morrison, will you?"

Peanut sprang up, glad of something definite to do.

"This is Smith," came the voice. "Who's on the wire?"

"Morrison, a new man," said Peanut.

"Oh, yes, well, take these names carefully, will you? It's a list of patronesses for the Masonic Ball next week. They kick if you get their middle initials wrong."

"Let her go," said Peanut.

He took down the names, copied them out on his typewriter, and passed them over to the desk man. And that was all he did that day.

"It doesn't take a towering intellect to be the kind

of reporter I am," he confided to Bill Judd, plaintively, after the first edition had gone to press.

"It doesn't take a towering intellect to be the kind of reporter any of us are in this little berg," said Bill. "Nothing much breaks here."

"Don't you want to get to New York?" Peanut asked.

The other shook his head. "Not on a newspaper," he answered. "It's my home here, and I'm staying on because I can live cheaper. Writing's my game."

"You mean books?"

"Novels, and short stories," Bill replied. "I work on 'em evenings."

"That's out of my class," Peanut mused. "I never went to college. But I've got a hunch I can make a reporter, maybe, and get to New York, where things *do* break. Maybe I'll interview you when you're a famous writer!"

They both laughed, and became better friends.

"Let's take a walk," said Bill, when they left the office.

It was a fine day, the first of April, and the two moved along rapidly through the main street of Hampton, looking now and then in a shop window.

"Gosh," said Peanut, as he spied a fishing rod, "it's April one! The law goes off on trout to-day, and here we are pounding pavement."

"Yes," said Bill, "you have to give up a lot o' things when you start in working."

"You have to give up exercise, that's the worst," Peanut answered. "I've been on the job only two days, and I feel as if I'd like to bust up something, just to use my arms and legs."

"You ought to join the Boys' and Young Men's Club, and then you could use their gym and pool," said Bill. "Come on, I'll take you 'round there."

"Say, you're a regular feller!" Peanut cried. "A pool-wow!"

Bill took him to ■ big building, which had reading and game rooms, a gymnasium, lockers, shower baths, and a swimming pool, and introduced him to the Director. He found it would cost him ten dollars to join as he was over eighteen, but as he had more than enough saved up, he decided it was well worth the price, to keep in good physical condition.

"Don't you have Boy Scouts here, that I could help with in the evenings?" he asked. "I've been a Scout Master down in Southmead."

"Oh, yes, sure enough! You're the chap whose Scouts caught the fern thieves," said the Director. "Sure, we have Scouts—a rough lot, some of 'em, but good boys, at that. I guess we can use you, all right."

"Well, that's going to be a help," said Peanut to his new friend, as they went out. "Now I can be

doing something nights. Say, it's kind o' lonely sitting 'round a boarding-house all evening, or going to a movie. Besides, I'm not keen on movies. The stories seem kind o' silly and unreal to me."

"They almost always are silly and unreal," Bill replied. "You're quite right. Read a good book instead of going to them. A reporter can't read too many books, on too many subjects. If you're going to get to New York, you want to learn as much as you can. I have a lot of books I used in college. Any time you want to borrow any, you let me know."

"I'd like to start right off!" cried Peanut.

"Well, you ought to start with Bryce's 'American Commonwealth,'" said Bill. "I'll bring it around to-morrow. That'll keep you busy for a while."

The next day he brought the book, in two fat volumes, and Peanut gave a whistle as he looked at it. "If I remember all that, I'll be a wise guy," he said. He put the books carefully in his desk, and had begun on his typewriting practice, at which he was beginning to get fairly rapid, when J. S. came to the door of his cubby-hole, and called to him.

"Yes, sir?" said Peanut, entering.

The editor pushed a slip of paper toward him. "Go over and see what this is worth," he said.

That was all.

Peanut looked at the slip with trembling fingers.

It was his first assignment! It was a clipping from yesterday's issue, pasted on a slip of paper. The clipping said:—

“There will be a meeting of the Hampton Play-ground Association, recently formed, at the house of Mrs. Caleb Potter, on Barclay Street, at ten o'clock Wednesday morning.”

Peanut went to his desk, took several sheets of copy paper and folded them to fit his pocket, as he had seen the other reporters do. (It had surprised him when he realized that reporters don't use notebooks. Some of the men even came in to write their stories with notes taken on the backs of old envelopes.) Then he looked up Mrs. Potter's street number in the city directory, put on his hat, and hurried proudly out.

He got to the house shortly before ten o'clock, and Mrs. Potter herself received him. She was a young, energetic woman, with a small boy of four clinging shyly to her skirts, and peeking at Peanut.

“The editor sent me 'round to find out what was done at the meeting,” said Peanut, hesitatingly. He felt oddly ill at ease.

“Well, I can't tell you till we've had the meeting,” Mrs. Potter smiled. “Can I? You come back at noon, and I'll tell you. Wait a minute,” she added, as Peanut started to go. “If you have time between now and noon I wish you'd go over to what

they call the Park at First and Van Deusen Streets and take a good look at it; see what chance you think children have to play there. Then go over farther into the section where the laboring people live who work in the mills, and see what place the children have to play there, except the streets. Then you'll understand better why we've formed this association."

Peanut did as she asked. The park she had mentioned was in a crowded part of town, with frame houses built closely all around it, and Peanut realized that it must offer about the only play field for thousands of children. It was about two or three city blocks square. There was a band stand, very ugly, in the middle of it, an iron fence all around it, and a good many trees and flower beds. But most of the park consisted of lawn, carefully fenced, and stuck full of "Keep off the Grass" signs. There was not a spot in it, except on the paths, where children could play.

Peanut walked on southward into the part of town where the thousands of factory hands lived. He passed through street after street of little wooden or brick houses, set so close together you could almost lean out of the window and touch the next wall, but not another open space did he see till he came to the barbed wire fences of the great mills. Inside those fences there was some open space, but it was

all covered with cinders and broken machinery and other waste, and, besides, you couldn't get into it.

Peanut reflected on the conditions in Southmead, where all you had to do to be in a big field was to climb under your back fence, and he began to realize what living in a city meant for a small boy, especially a poor boy. He also began to realize what Mrs. Potter's society was probably going to try to do. With his thoughts full of the hard lot of the laborers' children, who had no place to play in but these narrow, dirty streets, he started back toward her house, and before he got out of the poor quarter saw a little child almost run down by an automobile, which came quickly around a corner. It came so quickly that Peanut was hot with rage, and took down the number of the car on a piece of paper, and stopped at the City Hall to look up the name of the owner.

At Mrs. Potter's he found a dozen women and three or four men. He was invited, very much embarrassed, to come into the library, where the meeting was being held. Here one of the men outlined to him the object of the society, which was to secure adequate open spaces in the city where the children could play in safety, to utilize school grounds in summer, and to raise funds to employ playground supervisors to look after the children's games.

"I wish the *Herald* would help us in this cam-

paign," said Mrs. Potter to Peanut, very earnestly and sweetly. "Won't you try to persuade your editor? Last year there were ten children killed while playing in our streets."

"I saw one nearly killed this morning," said Peanut. "I got the number of the car, too!"

"Good for you!" she laughed.

The man gave Peanut the names of the officers of the association, and he hurried out, much excited, and almost ran back to the office.

"Well," said J. S., "what's in it?"

Peanut explained as rapidly as he could. "I went down there to the First Street Park myself," he added, "and there's no place that don't—doesn't say, 'Keep off the grass,' and farther south in the mill district there's not a place for kids to play at all, 'cept the dirty, narrow streets, and I saw a kid 'most hit by a car that came around a corner on two wheels without blowing its horn, and I got the number and looked up the owner's name. Gee, I'd like to put it in the story!"

"What is the name?" asked J. S. drily.

"H. Nicholson," said Peanut.

J. S. gave him a curious look. "If you put that in the story, I wouldn't give much for your job," he said. "Do you know who he is?"

"No," said Peanut. "I only know he's got a bum chauffeur that ought to be locked up."

"Very likely," J. S. remarked. "But H. Nicholson happens to own half those mills you saw, and about half the mortgage on this paper. We don't expose him much, my son."

Peanut's jaw fell. It was his first blow. He had always thought a newspaper could say anything about anybody, if it was true. And here was something he felt *ought* to be said.

The editor looked at him, not unkindly. "I know how you feel," he remarked. "But we're a small town paper, and we have to keep on the right side of everybody. These playground people are starting something, all right—and that's news. But we can't take sides. If they want the city to buy land for playgrounds, it's going to make a lot of taxpayers sore. If they want to trample up the grass in First Street Park it'll make a lot of other sentimental folks mad. Write up just the facts—names of officers, what they want to do, number of children killed last year. You can lay that ~~on~~ thick, if you want. But mind, no opinions of your own. You're a reporter, not an editorial writer."

Peanut went back to his desk, crestfallen and disappointed. But he obeyed orders. He merely set forth in plain language the aims of the new organization, its officers, and the like. But he did "lay it on thick" about the number of children killed in the streets, and in the first paragraph, too. He turned

in his copy as soon as it was done, and furtively watched the copy reader editing it. He saw the blue pencil descend several times, but the copy went into the tube, and was shot up to the composing room for the evening edition. When the presses rumbled Peanut had a thrill. They were printing his story! And when the boy came in from the press room with the damp papers, he grabbed one excitedly, and began searching for his contribution.

There it was on the second page, with a large column head-line, and something about the number of children killed in the head-line, too! He read it over, and found it hadn't been greatly changed.

But, after all, he wasn't satisfied. He felt too strongly the need of playgrounds. His story sounded weak and flat. It didn't boost the idea enough. How *could* he boost the idea, and still be, ■ J. S. said, "a reporter, not an editorial writer"?

He confided his troubles to his new friend, Bill Judd, who wasn't able to help much.

"Sure, we need playgrounds," Bill said, "but the *Herald* is awfully careful about stepping on the taxpayers' corns. J. S. is all right. He'd be a fighter if he owned the paper. But he's just a paid man like the rest of us. I guess you're up against it, Peanut."

"There's always a way," Peanut answered. "I don't like to be stumped."

"You're starting in strong for a cub reporter," Bill laughed, "wanting to begin a crusade the first week on the job!"

"But it's for the kids," Peanut answered, earnestly. "Gosh, I can't stand seeing the kids not get a fair show!"

"Why don't you go up to the Club and get an interview with the Director about the Boy Scouts having no outdoor place to drill, or something?" Bill suggested.

"Say, that's an idea! Suppose the pape would print it?" (Peanut had already dropped into the newspaper lingo, and called his paper "the pape.")

"Can't tell till you try. It wouldn't be editorial to quote a man, anyhow."

"I'll do it to-night!" Peanut declared.

And so his first assignment ended with the cub reporter bent on making it bigger than it was!

CHAPTER III

THE CUB'S CRUSADE

PEANUT went directly from the office to the Boys' Club, and hunted out the Director. He found the Director knew all about the new playground association, and, in fact, had been one of the people to suggest it, but he wasn't officially connected with it, because he felt it might hurt the Boys' Club to have its head mixed up in what promised to be a fight.

"But I'll tell you all you want to know about the need of playgrounds," he said, "and I'll tell you what other cities are doing to supply them."

Peanut got out his note paper, and took down ~~an~~ interview with the Director.

"Now, you come around to-night, and take out the troop of Boy Scouts you are going to help with," the Director added, "and try to find a place to drill 'em in, in this city. Then you can write another interview with yourself about that!"

"An interview with myself—that's a good one!" Peanut laughed.

He took the boys out that evening, two patrols of rather ragged and dirty little newsboys, who were

full of mischief and swore like troopers. But Peanut was enough for them. He lined them up for inspection in the gym before starting, and when one of them swore, he called him out of the line.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Joe Rafferty. They calls me Miggles," said the boy, with a decidedly fresh air.

"Well, Miggles," said Peanut, "we don't swear in the Boy Scouts, so I guess we'll have to wash your mouth out. Come on!"

He took the astonished Miggles to a bath, mixed up some soap-suds in a cup, and made him gargle his mouth with it, while the other boys howled with glee.

"Taste good, Miggles?" they taunted.

"Hi, he's swallerin' some!"

"Blow a soap bubble, Miggsie!"

But Miggles didn't swear again that evening.

Peanut led his ragged patrol out on the street, and asked them where they could go to drill.

"There ain't no place 'cept the street," somebody said.

So they picked out a quiet a street as they could find, but even there motors kept coming through and broke up their lines, and there wasn't really room enough to manoeuver. After an hour of marching, Peanut brought them back to the gym, and put them through ten minutes of setting up exercises, and then made them all strip and get under the

shower baths, where they splashed and yelled and had a grand time.

"Anyhow, they're clean," he said to the Director, afterward, "and they needed it. After you've drilled in the dusty streets, your lungs feel like a nutmeg grater."

"Put that in your interview," the Director laughed.

And Peanut did. First he wrote out the interview with the Director of the Boys' Club, and then one with himself, just calling himself a Scout Master at the Club, and narrating how hard it was to find a place to take these ragged little boys to drill out-of-doors. He also put in a word about the need of discipline for such boys, and said something about the good work the Boy Scout movement is doing. He wrote out both these interviews on the typewriter at the office, getting there at seven o'clock when the scrub women were still cleaning up. At half-past eight he took his copy in to J. S.

"What's all this?" said the managing editor.

"It's some interviews I got last night about playgrounds," Peanut answered.

J. S. took the copy. "Say, are you trying to start something?" he grunted. "I'll look it over."

But though he spoke gruffly, Peanut somehow felt he was pleased that one of his reporters had got copy for the paper on his own initiative.

He gave Peanut no assignment up till ten o'clock.

At ten he came out of his office with a letter in his hand, and walked over to Peanut's desk.

"Turn your lamps on this," he said.

Peanut read it. It was a long letter from some woman who was highly indignant at the new association because they proposed to spoil "the beautiful grass" of First Street Park by turning the children loose on it.

"Bet she's a rich old maid and never had any kids!" Peanut exclaimed, indignantly.

"She is," J. S. grinned. "Now, read this one."

He passed over another letter, from a man signing himself "Taxpayer," who objected to the proposal to "waste" city money buying land for playgrounds.

"Why, how can it be a waste of money to make the kids stronger and healthier?" Peanut cried. "Gosh, they give me a pain!"

"You'll have pains most of the time if you let such people excite you," J. S. remarked drily. "I'm going to print your interviews, and also these letters. By the way, what was the name of that Scout Master?"

Peanut turned red. "It—it was me—I mean I," he stammered. "I'm helping up there at the Boys' Club. Thought it didn't look right, though, to use the name of a reporter on the paper. It's all true, honest, it is!"

"I don't doubt it," said J. S. with a grin. "You are evidently interested in this crusade you've started, and I'm going to give you a chance to keep on with it. Looks as if it would make good news stuff. Now, here's a list of twenty or thirty prominent Hampton people. Go get interviews with all of 'em on the subject. If they're short ones we can use half a dozen or more to-morrow, and then string 'em along for a week. I'd like one with the Mayor, though, to start off with to-day. You might go up to City Hall now."

Peanut grabbed his hat and rushed out. This was getting into the thick of things with a vengeance! At the City Hall he found another reporter, who "covered" City Hall news every day, as a regular assignment, and told him what he was after.

"I'm going to see the Mayor in half an hour myself," said the reporter. "Come in with me. You ought to know him, anyhow. He's a shifty guy, but he has a lot of news to hand out at election times."

When they were finally admitted to the Mayor's office, Peanut saw a middle-aged man sitting at a desk, smoking a huge cigar. He was a big man, with a double chin and a forty-six waist line.

"This is Morrison, one of our new men, Mr. Mayor," said the older reporter. "He's been sent up to get your views on this public playground agitation."

The Mayor stretched out a big, soft hand which

Peanut thought to himself felt like a horn pout without the horns. "Pleased to meet yer, kid," he said.

Then, as Peanut got out his note paper, he took a pull at his cigar, looked wisely at the ceiling, and emitted the following:—

"You can say that Mayor Hurley said that nothing was closer to his heart than the welfare of the children of Hampton. I believe that the future welfare of this city depends on the moral and physical health of the rising generation. I believe that the poorer children who live at the southern end of town should have just as much opportunity to exercise, to play, to romp on God's green grass, as any other children."

("This is great!" Peanut was thinking, ■ his pencil flew.)

"But," the Mayor continued, "as Mayor of the city, elected to do the people's will, I am (together with the City Council, of course) only the custodian of the city funds, and the question of purchase by the city of land for playgrounds is one the voters must rightfully decide. Furthermore, our beautiful and cherished parks, the pride of our city, are for adults as well as children, and their use must be determined by the people. Of course, our efficient police force sees to it that speed laws are enforced on the public thoroughfares."

He paused impressively. "How's that?" said he.

"It's a good slack wire performance, since you ask me," said Peanut. He knew it was a bold and rather fresh thing to say to the Mayor of the city, and if he had stopped to think, he would not have said it. But he was so angry at this fat, overfed politician, who was trying to stand in both with the poor parents who needed the playgrounds for their children, and with the rich taxpayers, in the same interview, that Peanut lost his temper.

The Mayor half rose from his seat, and his face grew very red.

"I—I beg your pardon," Peanut said hastily, and backed out of the room.

He hurried back to the office, and wrote out the interview word for word as the Mayor had given it, taking great pains to make no mistakes. Then he took it in to J. S.

"I—I guess I got in bad," he confessed. "Mayor Hurley gave me this interview, and then said, 'How's that?' and I lost my temper, and told him it was a good slack wire performance. Maybe you'd better put somebody else on the story."

To his amazement, J. S. tipped back his head and roared with laughter, something so unusual with him that the reporters outside paused at the sound.

"You said that to the old fox, eh?" J. S. chuckled. "Well, it was mighty fresh of you, and don't let it happen again. It's not a reporter's place

to comment on the people he's getting news from. Remember that."

Then he read the interview rapidly.

"Still, you were right," he added. "We'll keep you on the story another day, if you'll promise to be good. Now see how many more of those interviews you can get. I've got six more letters in the last mail. We've got quite a row started!"

As Peanut went out of the office, he met the City Hall man coming up the steps. He stopped and slapped the boy on the back. "Say, you handed the old bird one that time, Peanut!" said he. "You'll never be chairman of the Democratic City Committee."

Peanut went on with a glow in his bosom. The City Hall man, one of the big reporters of the paper, had called him by his first name—or, better, by his nickname!

For the next two hours, armed with his list of names, he endeavored to secure interviews with leading citizens, and forgot all about luncheon. Sometimes he had to wait fifteen or twenty minutes outside a man's office before he could see him. One man was out of town. Another wouldn't be back till four o'clock. He very soon discovered that to get twenty or thirty interviews, even in a small city like Hampton, wasn't a job which could be done in ■ day, or even two days. But he was greatly

cheered by the fact that all but one of the people he did see were heartily in favor of public playgrounds. The leading dry-goods merchant even suggested that a commission ought to be at once appointed to consider sites for the first one, and recommend condemnation proceedings.

"No self-respecting taxpayer will have the face to begrudge the money!" he exclaimed, thumping his desk, and Peanut then and there decided to buy all his clothes at this man's shop.

The boy was only reminded of the flight of time and his empty stomach when he came out of the store, and met one of his own Scouts of the evening before, none other than Miggles, selling *Heralds* on the street.

"Here, Miggles, give me one," he called, passing out two pennies.

"Sure," said Miggles, with a grin, giving him the Scout salute.

Peanut saluted back, and took his paper into a lunch room, to read it while he ate.

His story, and the eight letters to the editor, took up practically one whole page! There was a big head across the top —

Battle on for City Playgrounds!

and under it came first his two interviews in favor. Then, under a separate head, was the interview

with the Mayor. This head delighted him. It read—

Mayor Hurley Straddles the Fence.

Some of the letters were against the plan, others were for it. At any rate, Peanut realized that it was going to be the most talked of subject in Hampton for the next few days—and he was helping to make it so! He felt very proud as he walked back to the office to write up his interviews for the next day's paper.

J. S. came over to his desk as the reporters were going out, for it was almost closing time when Peanut got back.

"Whom have you landed?" he asked.

Peanut read him the list.

"Well, you might stay, if you don't mind, and have those ready for to-morrow. There's one man I want you to land in the morning, before this goes any farther. Camp on his trail till you get him. Some time I'll tell you why. It's A. W. Perkins, proprietor of the big Blue Boar Inn on Maple Avenue. I want his interview to lead off to-morrow. Be very careful you quote him exactly, too."

"Yes, sir," said Peanut, and he began to pound his typewriter, in the now vacant office. It was dark before he finished, and he had to turn on the light over his desk.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRUSADE ENDS IN TRIUMPH

THAT evening, as he sat in his little hall bedroom in the boarding-house where he lived (you can't live in very palatial quarters on ten dollars a week), Peanut tried hard to read Bryce's "American Commonwealth," to find out just how America is governed, for he realized that to a reporter no knowledge could be more useful. But he couldn't keep his mind on the book, he was so excited over his crusade, and he could not keep from wondering why J. S. was so eager for him to get an interview with A. W. Perkins, the big hotel man. Of course, he was one of the leading citizens of the city. In fact, his hotel was the biggest in the whole county. But Peanut felt there must be some other reason behind that.

The Blue Boar Inn, a huge affair painted white, set back from aristocratic Maple Avenue in a lawn studded with great trees, had just opened for the season. Peanut was told when he got there that Mr. Perkins was very busy and couldn't see him.

"Then I'll wait," said he, and sat down in the lobby where he could keep ~~an~~ eye on the door of

the proprietor's private office. The door remained closed for over an hour. Finally it opened, and a man dressed extremely well and looking like a person who was used to giving commands, came out and spoke to a clerk. Peanut, who had seen Mr. Perkins' picture, recognized him, and rose to his feet. The clerk said something, and the man beckoned to Peanut brusquely.

“ You want to see me ? ”

“ Yes, sir, the *Herald* sent me,” the reporter answered.

“ Well, I'm very busy.”

“ It won't take long.”

“ Come in, then, and make it short.”

Peanut followed him into his office, and told him what he wanted, meanwhile taking out his note paper.

“ Put up that paper ; it makes me nervous,” the man snapped. “ You can remember all I have to say. It's another sentimental socialistic dodge to rifle the taxpayers' pockets, I suppose. You can tell your paper that there aren't many children stop at my hotel, and I'm not interested.”

“ Is that all ? ” asked Peanut.

“ Yes,” said the man, turning away and picking up a letter.

“ I think I can remember that,” said Peanut, and went out.

But he stopped in the lobby, and wrote down exactly what Mr. Perkins had said, lest he should forget it. Then he hurried back to tell J. S.

"Well, what did he say?" the managing editor asked.

Peanut laid down the sheet of paper on which he had typewritten the interview, and J. S. read it. Then he wheeled sharply in his chair.

"Are you sure he said that?"

"Dead sure," Peanut replied. "He made me put my paper up—said I could remember all he had to say. But as soon as I got out in the lobby I wrote it down exactly, so's to be sure."

"Any witnesses?"

"N-no, I don't think so. The clerk out behind the desk might have been able to hear. Why?"

"Why? Because he'll try to wriggle out of saying this, when he reads it in cold print," said J. S. "If I'd guessed he'd be such a complete blithering ass as to say a thing like this, I'd have sent a witness along with you. I wonder if I dare print it."

"I think any man who'd say a thing like that ought to be shown up," said Peanut. "It sounds horribly heartless to me."

J. S. looked at the boy sharply. "You're a good sort, Peanut," he said, "and you're going to get a lot of jolts in this business, running up against men like Perkins. He *is* heartless. And I happen to

know he's got ambitions to be Mayor of this city, on a 'business' platform. But what he really wants is to get some streets cut through in the north end of town, to develop a lot of property he owns and boom its value. He's rich, and he cuts a big figure in this town with some people—but I guess we can make some other people open their eyes with this interview, for I'm going to print it, by heck!"

J. S. not only printed it, but he put a big, sarcastic head-line over it, and wrote an editorial about it, and that night at dinner at his boarding-house Peanut heard three or four people discussing it. All of them were indignant at Perkins.

"Why," said one woman, "I never heard of such a heartless remark! The man ought to be tarred and feathered!"

Peanut put in a word. "Why don't you write to the *Herald*, if you are in favor of playgrounds?" he said. "A whole lot of letters would help."

"That Perkins man got me so mad, I believe I will," she answered. "I never wrote to a paper before."

"So will I," said another woman.

"Me, too," said a man.

Indeed, the *Herald* was literally bombarded with letters the next day. Some of them abused Perkins so bitterly that J. S. didn't dare to print them. Peanut, as he rushed about town getting interviews,

found everybody much keener on the question, more willing to talk. And nearly everybody was in favor of the playgrounds. He began to realize that the public indignation at Perkins' brutal remark had made people afraid to take his side, even if they might have been tempted to do so.

Another day passed, and still public sentiment grew. J. S. sent a second reporter out to write "human interest" stories about the children in the mill section and their efforts to play tag and baseball in the streets, and to report every case he saw of a child in danger from an automobile. Peanut was sent to see Mrs. Potter, who received him with enthusiasm and gave him a long list of names of people who had joined the association, and also a list of donations toward a fund to help purchase a playground.

And then a small boy was killed by a motor truck on South First Street while he was playing baseball in the street. Peanut went, with Bill Judd, to the poor little fellow's house that evening, and almost wept himself when he saw the weeping mother, and the father trying to comfort her, and the little brother and sister, with scared, solemn eyes.

"That's what they do to us poor folks," the mother cried. "No place to play but the streets. And all he was doin' was tryin' to have a good time with the other boys!"

Bill Judd the next day wrote a human interest story about that scene in the tiny frame house, with the weeping mother and the still little form in a coffin in the corner of the front room. Peanut wrote the story of how the accident happened. And it all went on the front page.

Then J. S. called him into his office.

"Go up to Mrs. Potter's," he said, "and tell her from me it's the psychological time to strike. Can you remember that word? This story, on top of Perkins' break, will bring public sentiment to a boiling point, where she can't get it again in a year. Tell her to get hold of the alderman for her ward and have him introduce a bill at once, to open part of First Street Park to the children for a playground, and to begin condemnation proceedings to purchase a site for a public playground in the mill district. Tell her to get a move on!"

Peanut rushed out, and delivered his editor's message.

"Yes, he's right," said Mrs. Potter. "I've called a meeting of our directors for this afternoon. I'll telephone over to Alderman Curran and see if he'll come, too. Will you come at five o'clock and get the report? I hardly know how to thank you for all you and the *Herald* have done already."

"It's all for the kids," said Peanut. "And it's lots o' fun," he added.

Peanut left her house again at half-past five with the news that Alderman Curran was ready to introduce the playground bill at the next meeting of the Board, which came the following evening. The following afternoon the *Herald* made a big display of the fact, and ran an editorial advising everybody who was interested to attend the debate, in the gallery, and lend their support. The *Herald* had now come out for playgrounds "with both feet," as Peanut said. He realized that it had done so because it felt that was the popular side to be on, but as long as it was the right side, he couldn't complain. He hoped J. S. would let him report the meeting, but of course that job went to the City Hall man. Peanut, however, went to the debate, as did J. S. himself.

It wasn't much of a debate, either. The aldermen felt too keenly the force of public opinion in the matter. They voted to open half of First Street Park at once, exclusively as a children's playground, and voted five hundred dollars to fence it properly and another five hundred to furnish a special officer for the next six months to see that order was maintained. Then they voted to establish a playground commission authorized to investigate the best site for a new playground in the mill district, to report as soon as possible. There were some speakers against both these motions, but Alderman Curran,

armed with a lot of figures supplied to him by Mrs. Potter, and with a lot of facts about what other cities do for their children, made what Peanut thought was an eloquent reply, and in the course of it he quoted what he called, "the words of that noble-hearted patriot, A. W. Perkins, lover of his fellow men, and especially of our children."

"Do we want to be like A. W. Perkins?" he cried. "Do we want to stand up in this hall and say, 'I haven't any children in my house so the question doesn't interest me' ? If any member of this honorable body wants to take that attitude toward the hundreds of children of Hampton who have no place to play but the streets, let him stand up and vote against this bill!"

There was loud applause from the gallery, and Peanut saw a smile cross the lean face of J. S. at the sarcastic mention of A. W. Perkins' name.

When the vote was taken, it stood ten to two in favor of the bill.

"And the Mayor won't dare to veto it," said J. S.

When the meeting was over, Mrs. Potter and several other women and men crowded up to the editor, shaking hands with him and thanking him.

"And I want to thank this reporter, too," Mrs. Potter cried. "He was such a great help. In fact, I feel more like hugging him!"

The rest all laughed, as Peanut blushed red as a

beet. But J. S. said, "Tut, tut, don't spoil the boy. He was doing his job as a reporter. It's all in the day's work. To-morrow he'll tackle something else. Come along home, Peanut."

When they were outside, the managing editor surprised him by walking along at his side, and taking him into a drug store for a soda, as it was a warm night.

"Where do you live?" he asked the boy, as they finished.

Peanut told him.

"Comfortable?"

"Oh, yes. A bit too much hash, that's all."

"Won't hurt you, if you don't know what's in it," J. S. grinned. "Begun to drink yet?"

Peanut was surprised at the question. "Why, I'm a Scout Master!" he exclaimed.

J. S. grinned again, but rather wryly. "I wish all reporters were," he said.

He continued walking along with Peanut, and presently he began to talk.

"You've just been through your first newspaper crusade," he said. "What did you think of it?"

"I—I thought it was great!" cried Peanut. "'Course, I knew newspapers had a lot of power, but I didn't know they could do so much. I—I felt as if I were *helping* in a good cause."

"Yes, newspapers can do a lot of good, and by

the same token they can do a lot of harm," said J. S. "It's really a kind of advertising, only a more effective kind than advertising itself, because you feel that Ivory Soap is, after all, paying for its space, but when you see a story in a paper you think it's a piece of fact that isn't paid for by anybody. If you see that story often enough, it gets to be the thing you and everybody else talks about and thinks about. Newspapers can get playgrounds, and they can make wars. The newspapers—some of 'em—drove us into war with Spain in 1898, and saddled the Philippines on us. It's a terrible power, when you come to think of it, this power of putting thoughts into people's heads."

He stopped speaking and walked on a way in silence, while Peanut thought over what he had said.

"But what's a reporter going to do when he's told to write a story that puts wrong thoughts into people's heads?" the boy asked.

"Well, a reporter's like a soldier—he has to obey orders," said J. S. "Here's what an editor's up against,—he has to print the news, that's his first job, and sometimes that news he may believe would be better suppressed. But if he suppresses it, the public are going to say he doesn't get out a newspaper, and they'll buy the other fellow's paper, and then he'll starve to death. It's no cinch being an editor.

You're a bright boy,—you may find that out some day for yourself. But don't forget this past week. You've been in a crusade. You've seen what a newspaper can do to boom something good. Remember, you can make news more effective than fourteen-inch guns sometimes."

"And we got A. W. Perkins!" said Peanut.

"Yes, we got A. W. Perkins," J. S. agreed with a grin. "And he won't forget it, either. Good-night, son."

"Good-night, Mr. Sawyer," said Peanut, turning into his boarding-house.

He couldn't have told why, but somehow he felt sorry for J. S. If he had been ten years older, he would have known it was because J. S. had no children of his own, and had been talking to Peanut the way he would have liked to talk to his own boy. But Peanut didn't realize that, and he was too tired and sleepy to puzzle very long over the problem. He nearly went to sleep getting undressed.

CHAPTER V

THE NEXT DAY'S DULNESS

THE next day Peanut discovered that it takes all kinds of news to make a paper, and that a reporter's life is not all excitement. If he went to the office expecting to start in on another crusade, he was disappointed. Cooley came over to his desk shortly before nine o'clock and said, "J. S. thinks it's time we had a piece about Spring building operations in Hampton. He wants you to get it up."

"Spring building operations?" said Peanut, with a puzzled frown. "You mean how many new houses are being built? Golly, how'm I going to find that out?"

"You might take a walk around the city," said Cooley, "and count 'em."

Peanut realized that he was being jollied, and he took it good-naturedly.

"Say, I'm just as green as I look," he laughed. "I admit it. Come across with the right dope, will you?"

"Go up to the Building Commissioner's office in

the City Hall first, and copy off the list of permits for building operations. You want to get 'em all in a tabulated column and add up the total. Then go through the files of the paper for last Spring, and find our story for last year, and see whether this year's total is more or less. If it's more, tell how the city's growing. If it's less, don't say much about it! Then you might pick out three or four of the biggest items, like the new Masonic Block, and go around to see how the work is getting on. Get a few lines from the contractors."

Peanut went over to the City Hall, and hunted up the list of building permits. Then, for the first time, he realized what he was up against. The list covered page after page of typewritten paper.

"Have I got to copy all of them?" he said mournfully to the commissioner's clerk.

"'Fraid you have," the clerk answered. "We couldn't let the list go out of the office."

"I wish next year you'd put in a manifold," Peanut groaned.

"We do—but the copies have to be filed elsewhere."

"Well, make *another* copy then. Say, I never can add these straight when I get 'em copied. I didn't know reporters had to be sharks at arithmetic."

It took him nearly two hours to make the copy, and his fingers ached writing:—

To Patrick Murphy—porch,	- - -	\$100.00
" Susan Jones—porch,	- - -	80.00
" Thomas Robinson—garage,	-	275.00
" Thomas Rollins—porch,	- -	125.00

and so on, with now and then ■ big item, like ■ whole new house, or a factory, or business block.

"I wish about seven hundred of these guys had built their porches in the first place," he said to the clerk. "It would have saved me a lot of writing."

The clerk laughed. "There are a lot of porches this year, that's a fact," said he.

Peanut took his copy back to the office to add up the totals. He didn't see how he was going to get the job done in time for the afternoon paper, and told Cooley so.

" Didn't expect you would," said Cooley. "Tomorrow's time enough."

" He might have told me that at the start," thought Peanut, and then he grinned, realizing again that Cooley was testing him out. He got some lunch and hustled around to the new Masonic Block, to a new woolen factory, and two of the largest private houses that were being erected, to find out how the work was coming along. The next morning he hunted through the files of a year ago and found the previous total, discovering that this year the new building operations exceeded those of the year before by over \$15,000.

"That means Hampton's booming, I suppose," he told himself. "I must play that up in the first paragraph."

He sat down at his machine, and wrote an opening paragraph, setting forth the figures for last year and this, and telling what the biggest new buildings were. Then he read it over, and frowned.

"It sounds dull," he thought. "Dull as this whole job of copying figures by the hour. Wonder how a New York reporter would handle it?"

Then he had an inspiration. He grabbed up his list and set down on a scrap of paper the value of all the new porches and added up the total. It came to \$8,116, representing seventy-nine additions. Peanut chuckled to himself, tore the sheet of paper out of his typewriter, put in a new sheet, and began again.

"Hampton is going to have \$8,116 worth of new porches this coming summer," he wrote. "Seventy-nine houses are thus to be made more beautiful. Incidentally, we are going to have a new Masonic Block, a big new woolen factory, and sixty-seven new private dwellings, the largest being those of Solon Easton on Maple Avenue and Jude Wilkes on Ninth Street. The Building Commissioner has issued permits for building operations this coming season over \$15,000 in excess of last year. Hampton is booming! And it's going to be an open season on porches."

He read this paragraph over. "There, it's got some pep now," he said to himself.

Then he went on to tell how work was progressing on the most important of the new buildings, and at the end appended the long list he had so laboriously copied. Then he took his stacks of paper to Cooley.

"Took me 'most two days," he sighed, "and it was pretty hard to make it read like a novel."

Cooley glanced over the copy. "Sure your totals are right?" he asked.

"No," Peanut admitted. "I never was strong on arithmetic. Didn't know reporters had to be."

"A good reporter's strong on everything," said Cooley. "Theoretically," he added.

"I guess he ought to be really," said Peanut. "Wish I'd studied harder in school."

"That's what most of us wish when we get to work," Cooley replied.

When the paper appeared, Peanut grabbed a copy to see what had happened to his story. They had left his introduction just as he wrote it, and there was something about the porches in the head-line.

His friend Bill Judd, who was looking over the paper at the next desk, turned to him.

"Well, you got a smile out of the building story, Peanut," he said. "That's going some. It'll please J. S. too. He likes to get some snap into the paper."

You'll be soaked with the weather stories, first thing you know."

"Are weather stories supposed to be funny?" Peanut asked.

"They are *supposed* to be," Bill laughed. "You wait till the thermometer out on Main Street is about 104 in the shade, and about 150 in here, and you're feeling like a sick sponge in a hot oven and everybody in the office has a grouch, and nobody cares whether the paper comes out or not. Then J. S. 'll call you in and tell you to write a weather story that will cheer people up. 'Make it funny,' he'll say, 'or I'll fire you!' And he'll look as if he meant it, too."

"Say, I guess I won't try to be funny any more!" Peanut grinned.

"Yes you will; you can't help it," Bill replied. "You've got the real reporter's gift for dressing things up to make 'em readable. You'll be in New York some day."

Peanut flushed with pleasure. "Do you really think so?" he cried. "Oh, if it were only true!"

"It'll be true if you *want* it to be hard enough, and if you work for it all the time," Bill answered. He lowered his voice so only Peanut could hear him, and added, "I've been around this office more'n a year now, and I've watched the men. The one who had your desk, Field, has gone to New York already, and he's the only one. But while he was

here he was the one that worked hardest, and tried, just as you did with this building yarn, to dress up every story as well as he could. He used to read the New York papers to see how they handled stories, and he used to get good books from the library to see how the best English is written, while the other men were sitting in at a poker game somewhere. I'm banking on you to follow him."

"Say, you're a—a regular feller!" was all Peanut could find to reply. But in his heart he resolved to work as hard and as faithfully as Field had done.

CHAPTER VI

A "FIREBUG" BAFFLES THE POLICE

PEANUT was now settling down into the routine of newspaper life. The thing that makes the newspaper routine different from any other, however, is the fact that the newspaper man, while he knows exactly when he's got to be at the office and exactly the hour at which the paper goes to press, doesn't know what is going to be in the paper. A carpenter goes to his shop knowing he's got to make a window sash that day; a lawyer goes to his office knowing that he's got to plead such and such a case before the court at ten o'clock. But the reporter goes to his office totally unaware whether he'll have to cover a four alarm fire or a burglary or a baseball game or a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society of the First Congregational Church. This gives a pleasant spice of uncertainty to newspaper life, and keeps it from monotony.

Peanut soon found, too, that in a small city like Hampton a newspaper reporter before long gets to know a lot of people. He was sent up to the City Hall so often for one thing or another that he be-

came familiar with most of the city officials. There wasn't much crime in Hampton, but when there was a burglary or an automobile theft or an arrest for any cause whatever the paper made a good deal of it, so that Peanut came to know most of the police force, too. Then all the reporters on the *Herald* were supposed to go to any fire at night which was in their neighborhood, if it was an important blaze, so the paper could have a first hand account the next day, and when a fire occurred in the daytime, when the staff was on duty, whatever reporter was nearest J. S.'s door got jumped out to cover it. In this way Peanut got to know most of the fire department, too. He called the head of the department "Chief," and he used to take his Boy Scouts around to one of the engine houses of an evening, and get the firemen to drill the boys in the best methods of carrying a body out of a burning building or down a ladder, to show them how to shield the lungs from smoke, how to hold a net, and so on. The boys enjoyed this training hugely, especially when the firemen let one of them go up to the second story and jump into the net.

Then there were many other people in town whom Peanut came to know as sources of news. There were the men in politics, whom he very often had to interview about this or that. Like most boys, he thought at first that a congressman, or somebody

who wanted to be a congressman, must be a very wise person. But after he had interviewed such people a few times he made up his mind they weren't always so wise as they ought to be, and he began to wonder why the newspapers always print *their* opinions on every subject, when there are other people who know more about it. He spoke of this to J. S. once, and the managing editor grinned.

"They make our laws," he said. "The American people are interested more in politicians than in politics. We listen to the man running for office, and don't pay much attention to the expert. It's a price we pay for being a democracy."

Another phase of city life that Peanut came to know was the banquet and reunion side. Week after week, this, that or the other society held a banquet and reunion, and Peanut had to spend an evening listening to after-dinner speakers and taking notes of their speeches. He soon discovered that if a reporter should print everything the speakers said at a meeting, it would fill a whole page or more of the paper. The reporter has to boil down each speech to the important facts, and perhaps quote directly a few sentences which he thinks are the most interesting. After he had been to a dinner of the Harvard Club and heard speeches about Harvard, and a meeting of the Grange and heard

speeches about the cost of milk production and the best methods of growing onions, and a banquet of the Hampton County Bar Association and heard learned addresses on court procedure, and a reunion of the Veteran Fireman's Association and heard talks about the old days of hand fire engines, and half a dozen other dinners and reunions and meetings, Peanut began to feel as if he were getting a liberal education—and also as if he needed one, in order to report all these different speeches intelligently.

"Gosh, a reporter certainly gets variety!" he exclaimed to Bill Judd.

"Variety can get monotonous sometimes," Bill answered. "I'd like something more exciting than the annual conference of the Hampton Anti-Suffrage Association, that I drew to-day. The blooming old antis make me tired. They talk about woman's place being the home, and there are one hundred and twenty girls and women working in Bolton's store, without proper fire escapes, because Bolton's got a political pull. And there are more'n a thousand women and girls working in the woolen mills, too, let alone other stores and factories."

"Yes," said Peanut, "and the president of the antis is the old maid who kicked hardest at giving the kids a chance to play in First Street Park—didn't want the pretty green grass trod on. But

I'm kinder tired of meetings and banquets and things like that myself. Let's start something."

Bill grunted. "You have to be on one of Hearst's rotten yellow papers to start something," he said. "Honest papers just have to sit back and wait for real news to break."

"We might set Bolton's store on fire," Peanut laughed, "and show up the need of fire escapes. That would start something, all right."

"No it wouldn't," said Bill. "Bolton has a full page advertisement in this paper every day in the week. Think we'd dare show him up and lose that ad? Not much!"

"Well, we *ought* to," cried Peanut.

"Of course we ought to, and some day newspapers will do it. But just now most of 'em are too blamed afraid. Come on up to the Club and have a swim in the pool. It's too hot to do anything else."

The two reporters left the office and walked past Bolton's store on the way to the Club. It was an extremely hot summer day, and everybody on the street looked wilted and cross.

"If this heat keeps up, somebody'll get soaked with a weather story to-morrow," said Bill. "Hope it isn't me."

"I don't mind," said Peanut. "I've got a good idea for one—going to call out the Fire Chief and Hook and Ladder Number Three, and have 'em

climb up the Slater Building to find the top of the mercury from that big thermometer."

Bill laughed. "You'd keep good-natured in a fiery furnace, Peanut," said he.

The heat did keep up, not only the next day, but for several days thereafter. On the second day Peanut wrote his funny weather story, about the Fire Chief and Hook and Ladder Number Three climbing in search of the top of the mercury. But after that the weather stories began to get more serious. They consisted rather of the number of horses which were overcome, the number and names of people prostrated. Peanut had to go to the police station and the hospital for his facts now.

And on the night of the fifth day a serious fire broke out in a block on the north side of Main Street.

The firemen got it under control before it had spread to any adjoining buildings, but when Peanut talked with the Chief the next morning, before writing his story, the Chief told him that there was something queer about the blaze.

"There wasn't any boiler engine going in the building last night," he said, "because the elevator runs by electric motor and takes city current. The watchman had been on his rounds five minutes before the blaze was discovered, and where the blaze started, down near a basement door on the

back alley, there aren't any electric wires at all which could have short circuited. It looks incendiary to me."

Peanut quoted his words that afternoon in the paper.

The very next night another fire broke out, in a block two doors below the first one, and again the firemen had a tussle.

"There is certainly a firebug in town," said the Chief.

All the property owners along the main street and elsewhere in town now cautioned their watchmen to use greater vigilance, some of the big stores doubled their night guards, and the police announced a doubling of the night patrol.

But the next night there was a third fire, next door to the second. Like the other two, it started in the basement, and no natural cause could be discovered for it. Owing to the increased vigilance of the watchmen, and the preparations of the fire department, no great property damage was done, but it increased the public apprehension.

"Why don't the police catch the bug?" everybody was asking. The *Herald* had an editorial, asking the same thing.

The fourth night, at five o'clock in the morning, Bolton's store was set on fire. The flames shot up a freight elevator shaft from the basement, and did

considerable damage before they could be controlled, and in his story Peanut took pains to say it was lucky the fire occurred before the girls had come to work, because of the lack of fire escapes.

When the paper appeared, every word of this had been changed. His story said it was fortunate the fire occurred before the store was crowded with patrons, as a panic might well have ensued and some might have been injured, "in spite of the capacious exits." Peanut ground his teeth in rage, especially as the whole back page of the paper advertised a great "Fire Sale" at Bolton's.

"Capacious exits!" he cried, aloud, for anybody to hear. "There's only one passenger elevator, the stairs are narrow and crooked, and the only exits are the main door on the street, and one basement exit to the alley behind! It's a crime, that's what it is!"

"Shut up," said Bill. "You'll have the old man out here."

"I won't shut up!" cried Peanut. "I'm too hot."

"We're all hot," said Cooley, wearily. "The weather's bad enough, without getting excited."

J. S. had evidently heard the rumpus, for he poked his head out of his cubby-hole.

"What's Peanut orating about?" he asked.

"The copy desk has made me say Bolton's store has capacious exits, and it's the worst fire trap in

town, and everybody knows it's breaking the law," said Peanut boldly.

J. S. came out and stood among his reporters.

"Boys," he said, "Peanut's right. We all know that. But we don't own this paper, and Bolton is our meal ticket. The best we can do is to run down that firebug, and remove that much of the danger. The police don't seem to be able to. Let's see if the *Herald* can't get a beat on the police—it wouldn't be the first time a newspaper had put one over on the sleuths. How many of you are willing to go without your sleep for a few nights?"

Every reporter's hand went up.

"It's too blamed hot to sleep, anyhow," somebody laughed.

"Well, I can't let all of you go," said J. S. "Judd, and Sumner and you, Peanut, can try it first. Peanut's a Boy Scout; we'll see what he's good for. Don't bother me till you've got something."

J. S. went back into his office.

"Is that an assignment?" Peanut gasped.

"Sure it's an assignment, you poor boob," said Sumner, "and a darn stiff one, if you ask me."

"Well, when do we start on it, Mr. Holmes?" Bill laughed.

"Let's go over to the drug store and get a soda, and lay our plans," Sumner replied. "It's too infernally hot in here."

CHAPTER VII

THE REPORTERS CATCH THE FIREBUG AND PEANUT MAKES A FLYING TACKLE

THE three reporters crossed the street, and filled up on lemonade.

"Now," said Sumner, "I'll tell you my plan. Everybody's noticed that all these fires so far have been on the north side of the street. You know there's a sort of delivery alley runs along behind all the blocks on that side, and it's pretty evident whoever sets the fires must come along that alley, though how he gets into the buildings seems to have everybody guessing. Now, my plan is for one of us to go to each end of that alley to-night, and keep an eye on it, and the third to get up the roof of a low building behind, at the middle of the alley. We'd better go get ourselves each a whistle, and have a signal, so if one of us wants the others he can call 'em."

"We might go look at the alley, too," Peanut suggested.

They bought themselves tin whistles at a hardware store, agreeing on three sharp blasts as a signal, and then strolled down behind Bolton's store, where there was a big crowd attending the "fire

sale," into the narrow alley behind. This alley was lower than the street, and most of the Main Street blocks had rear basement doors and freight elevator doors opening out on it, for the express wagons came down along it to bring goods to the stores. It was about four hundred yards long, and on the farther side were stables, low warehouses, carpenter shops, and the like.

Directly behind Bolton's store, which was near the middle of the alley, was a grain and feed warehouse, only two stories high, with a flat roof. A beam projected from this roof, with a rope and pulley at the end, to hoist bales of hay to the second story with.

"I could go up that rope easy," said Peanut, "and get on the roof. From there I could see up and down the alley."

"All right, that's your post," the others agreed.

They walked to both ends of the alley, and discovered that to find a hiding-place at either end they would have to get inside the building which blocked the end, and use a window. So they entered first one building, and then, walking back, the other, and showing their reporter's badges made arrangements with the owners of the buildings to let them keep watch of the alley that night.

"Don't tell the cops, though, will you?" Sumner said, in each case. "We are trying to put one over

on 'em. If the *Herald* can land this firebug, it's a great scoop for us."

The men consented readily, for by this time they were pretty well disgusted with the police for not catching the trouble maker.

"Now, let's stroll over to police headquarters and see what theory the city's finest have got," said Sumner.

A captain and sergeant were sitting in the office, their coats off.

"Hello, boys," they said. "What's new?"

"That's what we came to find out," said Peanut. "Caught the firebug yet?"

The captain's brow clouded. "This ain't for publication," he declared, "but honest to Betsy, that case has me going. Somebody's got into every one of those buildings and out again without so much as breaking a pane of glass, and a patrolman on beat in that alley, too, and a couple more in Main Street. He's a pretty slick bug, all right, but we'll get him yet, if it takes every man on the force."

The three reporters sat around and talked for a while, and then strolled over to fire headquarters, where the men were all keyed up wondering where the next fire would break out.

"I think it's a spook sets 'em," one man said. "That fire in Bolton's started just inside the freight

elevator shaft, by the alley, and Bill James, of Company Three, was patrolling the alley five minutes before it broke out, and came running back there when he heard one of the watchmen open the back door and blow a whistle ; and not a bloomin' soul in sight except a cop."

" Maybe the cop set it," Sumner suggested, with a laugh.

" Crazy with the heat, eh ?" the captain replied. " Well, *somebody* did, that's sure. I found a bit of waste-rag ash right where the blaze started."

" We don't seem to have got any very valuable tips," said Bill, as the three moved away presently.

" Not very," said Peanut. But, in his own mind, he couldn't have told why, he was turning over something that had been said, and wondering about it.

The three reporters went to a lunch room presently, got some supper, and bought some sandwiches to put in their pockets for a midnight lunch. This was Peanut's idea. It was also his idea that they each buy a bottle of spring water, to have handy, for the night was a hot one.

" You need something to eat and drink, whether you're camping in the woods or on top of a hay and grain store," Peanut declared.

As soon as it came on dark, the three separated, each going to his post. Peanut anticipated some

trouble in getting up his rope without being caught, and he didn't want the cop on that alley beat to know he was up there. Fortunately, he met Bill James, the fireman from Company Three, whom he knew, and explained to him what the reporters were doing.

"Sure, I'll help you," said Bill. "Just walk with me."

The two of them strolled along the alley till they met the patrolman, and then they stopped to talk with him.

"Anything doing?" asked Bill James.

"Nix," said the patrolman, taking off his helmet and wiping his forehead. "I got a headache, that's all."

"You've had it some time, ain't you?" Bill said.

"Five days—five years," the other answered, and went abruptly on.

"Say, his eyes look queer," said Peanut.

"Do they? I didn't notice. Poor chap, he's been complainin' of the heat and his head. Don't say anything, but I found him pretty near all in two mornings ago, and got him braced up with some water from the firecock up the alley. I'm watching this beat. If he keels again, though, I'll have to report him, and it makes a hole in the pay envelope—he's got a wife and kids. But he was all right till after the fire broke out that night, and he kept

on the beat last night, too. Come on, now's your chance."

The two of them turned back behind the patrolman, and as he went on down the alley, Peanut, with his bottle of water tied in a paper parcel to his belt, went up the ropes hand over hand, got a grip over the beam, and clambered on to the roof.

"O. K.!" he whispered down to Bill James. "If anybody goes by under here, I'm going to see 'em. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Bill, and went back up the alley.

Peanut took off his coat and lay down on it with his face close to the edge of the flat roof, making himself as comfortable as he could, and awaited developments. The night was dark, but there was an arc lamp at either end of the alley, and several incandescents at various points along it, so that Peanut could vaguely see the forms of the cop and Bill James, as they prowled up and down. Every now and then he could see a flash of light in the dark windows of the blocks in front of him, and realized that the watchmen were going their rounds. The first stories of most of the stores, too, were lighted, so that the patrolmen out on the street could see inside. From time to time, Peanut could hear a basement door on the alley opening, and then he would peer eagerly toward it. But always it

turned out to be opened by a watchman, who came out for a breath of air, or a chat with the patrolman or Bill James. Bill and the cop both had flashlights, and now and then Peanut could ~~see~~ these lights turned on.

So the night wore away, quietly, with nothing at all happening, and Peanut had heard a distant clock strike two. The roof was getting very hard and uncomfortable, and he got up on tiptoe and walked back out of sight to stretch himself. Just then he heard a step in the alley below, and he crawled up to the edge of the roof again, peering over.

It was nobody but the patrolman, but the watcher on the roof was arrested by his actions. He was listening at the basement door of Bolton's store. Then he ran to the next door, and listened. Satisfied, apparently, that no watchmen in those stores were near at the moment, he ran back to the very building Peanut was in, pulled a key from his pocket, and to Peanut's amazement began working at the lock. The reporter knew, from Bill, that no watchman was employed in this small storehouse, so there was nobody inside. Peanut poked his head far over the roof, and watched. The patrolman was evidently working with a skeleton key, for it took him a moment or two to get the door open, and he had to use his flashlight once. But the lock soon yielded, and he slipped inside. Peanut debated a

moment what to do. Should he slide down the rope and follow him in? No, he decided, if he did that he would either get caught coming out or else get locked up inside the building. But, on the other hand, if the cop *was* setting a fire, he ought to see him do it, in order to get eye-witness evidence. He swung out on the beam, slid down the rope so fast he burned his palms, and sneaked to the door, which the patrolman had closed behind him. Peanut opened the door very slowly and cautiously, just a crack at first, and then when he heard no sound, wider and wider till he could get his head in.

At first he could see nothing inside, but a second later a match flared in the pitch black interior, and by its light he saw the form of the patrolman, stooping over the floor. In another instant a tiny flame arose, evidently from a small pile of hay or waste, and by its glare Peanut could see that the cop had laid a little train of waste along the floor so the fire wouldn't reach the stored hay till he himself could get outside, and well on down the alley.

As he rose, Peanut shut the door quickly, and looked for shelter. The cop had come down the alley. He would keep on up, probably. The boy dashed fifty feet the other way, and squeezed himself into the thin shadow of an angle by a door frame, till he saw the patrolman come ~~at~~, lock the door behind him, and start up his beat. Then Pea-

nut blew his whistle, three short, sharp blasts first, as loud as he could, to call the other reporters, and then blast after blast to call Bill James and anybody else.

A second later he heard Bill running down the alley, and the cop came running back from the opposite direction. Two or three doors opened, and watchmen came out.

“Smash open that door, quick; there’s a fire in there!” cried Peanut, pointing to the warehouse.

Bill James and two watchmen picked up a beam which lay behind Bolton’s store and heaved it, like a battering ram, against the lock. The door flew inward, and they rushed over the threshold, one of the watchmen with an extinguisher in his hand. The interior was already full of smoke, but with the search-lights of the cop and the fireman they could see where the flames were licking up into a sack of oats, and working toward the piled hay. The spurt of the extinguisher put them out, but not before one of the watchmen had rushed away and pulled ■■ alarm.

Peanut, however, had not gone far into the building. He stood near the door, watching the patrolman, who was busy aiding. By the time the blaze was out, Sumner and Judd came running up, and with them another patrolman and a police sergeant.

“Have you got him?” Sumner whispered.

"Yes," Peanut whispered back, "cold—but don't say anything yet."

Those who had been putting out the fire now came to the door.

"Well, O'Brien," said the sergeant to the patrolman, "did he get away again this time?"

"I never saw a soul," O'Brien replied. "I was down my beat when I heard somebody blow a whistle, and ran back. I'd been past here not five minutes before, and there wasn't a sign of anybody or any fire."

"How about you, James?" the sergeant asked the fireman. "When did you cross O'Brien on your beat?"

"Just below," Bill James answered. "Nothing doing when I went by here, either. Ask the reporter what he knows. He blew the whistle."

"Reporter, eh?" said the sergeant, turning to Peanut. "This is the one they call Peanut, ain't it? Well, I suppose you know who set it?"

"Yes, sir, I saw it set," Peanut replied, quietly.

"You did, eh?" The sergeant and all the others except O'Brien crowded closer to him, just as the engines were heard screeching and tooting somewhere in the street.

"Go stop 'em, somebody," ordered the sergeant. "Here, you go, O'Brien, and tell one of the men to send the Chief here."

"I wouldn't send O'Brien," said Peanut.

"You wouldn't? Why not?"

O'Brien had already started, however, on the ~~run~~.

"Because he set the fire," Peanut answered.

Everybody gasped.

"Go, bring him back!" the sergeant ordered the other patrolman, who went after O'Brien on the dead run.

Peanut started too, crying back over his shoulder, "He'll make a break for it, you'll see!"

After Peanut came the rest, the watchmen forgetting their jobs.

Sure enough, at the end of the alley O'Brien turned down a narrow slit between two buildings, instead of up to the street, and after him dove the other patrolman, the three reporters, and the sergeant, who stopped to blow his whistle. By the time the pursuers had emerged into a second street, several firemen had joined in the chase. O'Brien still had a good lead, but Peanut, who was the youngest person in the crowd,—he was only twenty, remember, and had always lived an active, athletic life—was rapidly cutting him down. The second patrolman wasn't far behind Peanut.

O'Brien looked back over his shoulder, saw that he was being headed, and suddenly whipped out his gun to fire. Peanut instinctively dove for his knees, and that probably saved the boy's life, for he heard

the bullet whistle just over his head. Almost at the same instant his arms met around the cop's knees, and the flying tackle brought him crashing down to the street so hard that the revolver flew out of his hand. Another second, and the other cop was on top of him, and in two seconds more the rest of the crowd of pursuers.

They handcuffed him and picked him up, half stunned by the shock of his fall to the hard pavement, and they picked up Peanut, who was still embracing the cop's knees, with a wrenched shoulder and a jagged hole torn out of the knee of his trousers.

"Are you all right? Did he hit you?" cried Bill Judd, putting his arm around Peanut, and holding him up.

"No, I dove under his shot, I guess," Peanut panted. "Ouch! don't touch my shoulder! I've done something to that!"

"Get the wagon!" the sergeant commanded. "We'll thresh this out at the station."

Just then the Fire Chief came around the corner in his red motor, and Peanut, O'Brien, the sergeant and the other patrolman got in, and were rushed to police headquarters. Judd and Sumner, and, by the Chief's orders, Bill James, followed on foot as fast as they could. But while he was helping Peanut into the motor Bill James had found a chance to whisper:

"Don't peach on me, kid. I didn't report O'Brien's headache to save his family."

"What do you take me for?" Peanut whispered back.

O'Brien was held at the station house till the Chief of Police could be roused and had rushed to the scene. The Fire Chief came also, and in the stillness of the late night, under the lamps of the captain's desk, O'Brien, pale, his clothes torn, his eyes wild and bloodshot now, was arraigned and Peanut told his story. He told of the plan of the three reporters, and how he was stationed on the roof of the hay and feed warehouse, how he had seen O'Brien listen at the near-by doors, then let himself in with a key to the warehouse, and finally how he himself had slid down the rope, opened the door, and seen the patrolman setting the fire.

The captain questioned Peanut sharply.

"Did you see him do anything else queer earlier in the night?" he asked.

"No," said Peanut. "But when Bill James and I met him earlier in the evening he said he had a headache, and I said he *looked* queer, but Bill said he guessed he was just tired with the heat."

"Call James," said the captain.

"Here," said the fireman.

"Was O'Brien on his beat all night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Notice anything queer?"

"No, sir."

"Notice anything the night before?"

"N-no, sir."

"Well," said the captain sharply, "if O'Brien's been setting these fires for five nights, and nobody's noticed anything queer about him except this reporter, it's mighty strange. Sergeant, how about you?"

"He's complained of a headache ever since the hot spell set in," the sergeant answered. "But he seemed fit enough to do the job, and didn't want to lay off and lose his pay. He's got a wife and kids. Sullivan tells me he's been pretty grumpy and silent and you couldn't get any talk out of him."

"Send for Doc Allen at once," the captain ordered. Then he turned to the prisoner, who had been standing dazed and silent during all the testimony, as if he didn't know what it was all about.

"What did you set those fires for?" he asked, with a tone of sharp command.

The handcuffed patrolman wagged his head in a queer way, and tried to rub the perspiration from his forehead.

"Come, come, answer me!"

O'Brien raised his eyes which were bloodshot now, and, Peanut felt sure, not the eyes of a person in his right mind.

"It was so easy," he said with a weird laugh. "Nobody thought of lookin' for me. They made nice hot fires—hot—hot—hot—" he kept repeating the word.

"He wasn't so crazy he didn't try to escape, and shoot at the reporter," the sergeant said.

The captain nodded gravely. "Bugs often are sharp, and they never want to get caught," he answered, in the same low tone. "Poor devil, he's had a good record, too. Ah, here's Doc Allen!"

The police doctor came hurrying in, half dressed.

"Take this man out, Doc, and give him some tests," said the captain, "and when you come back there's a reporter here with a bum shoulder to be looked after. How do you feel, kid?"

"Oh, I can move it—not broken," said Peanut, who had sunk down, faint and weary, on a bench.

The doctor came back presently. "As far as I can see, from a preliminary test, O'Brien's been unbalanced by the heat," he said. "His reactions are all off. Give him a cool bath, and some sleep, and we'll have a thorough look to-morrow morning. Now, who's got the bad shoulder?"

Peanut rose, and with the help of Bill Judd and the doctor got his shirts off, and then the doctor felt him, and raised and twisted his arm while he tried not to yell.

"Only a sprain," the doctor concluded. "Come

around to my office and get a sling to keep you still."

"And then go home and get some sleep," added Judd. "Meet us at the office at 7:30, though, and we'll put this story in shape. Looks as if we had a beat on the police," he added with a grin at the captain.

"Looks as if *one* of you had," the captain answered.

"Oh, I just had the luck," said Peanut, limping after the doctor, out of the door.

It was daylight when Peanut came out of the doctor's office, with his left shoulder in a sling, and his lacerated knee bandaged up. He hobbled to his boarding-house, washed as best he could, changed his torn trousers, and started to lie down on the bed.

"No," he thought, "if I go to sleep now, I'll oversleep and be late! Gee, and with the best story of the season!"

He got up again, and forced himself to sit bolt upright in a chair at the window till breakfast. He was the first one down, and escaped before many of the boarders had had a chance to ask him how he hurt his shoulder.

"I fell," he told them. "Read the *Herald* this afternoon for particulars!"

Then he hurried to the office, his knee and shoulder getting stiffer all the time.

"Now," said Sumner, "Peanut can't write with one hand. He'll have to dictate. You take his eye-witness story, Bill, while I'm doing the introduction. One of us'll have to go up to the examination of O'Brien later, and find out what they decide."

"What'll they do to him if he's crazy with the heat?" asked Peanut. "Gosh, it's too bad!"

"You don't seem to care if he nearly winged you with a .38," said Sumner.

"If he was crazy, of course I don't," Peanut answered. "Why should I? He wasn't to blame."

The three reporters were hard at work when J. S. came in. He stopped by their desks.

"Got him, eh?" he said. "I heard it outside. Hurry up with your leader, Sumner. What follow-ups do you want?"

"Send a man up to Police Headquarters for the sanity test of O'Brien this morning, and statement from Chief what they'll do with him, in either case," said Sumner.

"Oh, please send somebody to find out if his wife and kids are all right!" said Peanut.

J. S. looked at the young reporter, and his sharp face smiled a little.

"Always think of the kids, don't you?" he said.

That was all. He walked into his office without even saying "Good work!" to his men.

But they didn't need to have that said to them. Peanut was realizing that morning — never before that a newspaper man's reward for a good job is in seeing the story in the paper, and if the editor doesn't call him down, that is a sign he is pleased. As J. S. often used to say to his reporters, "You're expected to do good work. You'll only hear from me when you don't!"

The three of them worked on busily, interrupted by the other men who came in, all of whom were curious to hear the tale; and Peanut had to stop a dozen times in his dictation to explain that his shoulder was only sprained. He had been deadly tired and sleepy when he came into the office, but now the excitement seemed to have waked him up. "It's like getting your second wind," he thought. He dictated to Bill Judd exactly what he had seen and done, up to the time of the arrival of the other two reporters on the scene. Then Sumner, who had written a "leader," or general introduction, took up the story of the chase, capture and examination in the police station. Meanwhile, J. S. had sent a reporter to look up O'Brien's past record, and another to see his family. A third reporter went to headquarters and about eleven o'clock came back with the news that the patrolman had been adjudged insane by three doctors, and wouldn't be tried, but committed to an institution for treatment. It was

expected that he would recover. His past record had been excellent.

"Hooray!" cried Peanut. "But what's going to become of his kids while he's in the bug house?"

"They'll be looked after," said J. S. "I'll put in an editorial about it. Come on, now, boys, get these loose ends together!"

It was noon when all the threads had been covered, and the story welded into a good, running account.

"Say, we've written the whole front page, I guess!" said Peanut with a sigh.

"And most of the second," grunted Cooley, who had been editing the copy as fast as they turned it over to him.

The three slipped out for a bite of lunch, and hurried back. Presently the presses rumbled, and a moment later in came the boy with the fresh, inky papers. Everybody grabbed one, and Peanut gasped.

There, spread all over the front page, under huge head-lines, was their story, and even in the head-lines it told how a reporter from the *Herald* caught the "firebug" in the act, and then how he brought him to earth with a flying tackle.

He read quickly Sumner's introduction, and then came to his own account, dictated to Bill. That, alone, took nearly two columns. He had just talked it off to Bill, who had written it down just that way.

It was as if Bill had written an interview with him. His ears tingled.

"Say, I'm glad you didn't call me by name, Bill," he said. "I feel like a fool as it is."

"The personal note made it more vivid," Bill answered. "'Course I didn't call you by name—we're all just *Herald* men when we're on a job."

"Well, Peanut," cried one of the older men, coming over to him, "how does it feel to be a hero?"

"Bloomin' sore," Peanut laughed, rubbing his aching shoulder with his free arm.

Just then J. S. came out. "You three Sherlocks can go now," he said, "and get some sleep. Peanut, I want to see you first."

Peanut followed him back into the little sanctum.

"I started you on ten dollars a week," said J. S. "I hear you spoiled a pair of trousers last night, so I'm going to raise you to fifteen. By the way, put the pants on your expense bill this week."

"Th-thank you, sir!" Peanut stammered.

But J. S. was already reading proof for the city edition.

Peanut went home, took off his clothes with much effort, and went to bed, at three o'clock in the afternoon—and slept till almost seven the next morning!

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY COMES

AFTER the excitement of the great "firebug" story, things quieted down again, and Peanut found himself once more in the routine of petty assignments. He spent two evenings a week with his group of Scouts at the Boys' Club, and every other Sunday he took them off on a hike to some pond, where they could get a swim.

"Poor little tads," he told Bill, "that's about the only bath they get, most of 'em. I make 'em take soap along in their packs, and they all have to scrub!"

On the alternate Sundays, now that he was getting fifteen dollars a week Peanut felt he could afford the eighty cents it cost him to go home, so on Saturday afternoons he took the trolley for Southmead and spent a night and a day with his family and his old friends. In the evenings when he was not with his Scouts, Peanut read and studied the books Bill Judd loaned him, especially the descriptive writers like Stevenson, Kipling, Stephen Crane and Richard Harding Davis.

"To know how to describe something in good, vivid language," Bill told him, "is what every re-

porter ought to strive for. It's only half the fight to get the news. The other half is to write it."

Autumn came, with the political campaigns, and news livened up. Peanut found himself going to political rallies in the evening, and taking notes on speeches. By day he had to interview politicians, and once, for three days, when the candidate for Governor of the state was making an automobile tour of the county, Peanut and a half dozen reporters from the Boston papers followed him around in another motor, till it seemed to Peanut that he knew by heart every word the candidate was going to say in every town.

The most fun that he got out of that trip was on the day when two motor loads of suffragists, with yellow banners, appeared in a town square while the candidate was talking, and "heckled" him till he had to say pointblank whether he was in favor of giving votes to women or not. He didn't dare say not, so he said he was in favor. Peanut was in favor, too. He had been for some time, particularly since it was the women of Hampton who had started the playground movement, and he sent an amusing and vivid story up to the *Herald* describing how the yellow motors came tooting into the square, and how the women drove the candidate into a pointblank statement, when not a man in the crowd had asked a single question.

The really interesting political fight that year was not in Peanut's state, however, but in New York City, where a very remarkable man named Russell Strong, a member of an old New York family, had set out on an independent ticket to smash Tammany Hall and the corrupt political bosses, and give the city a clean administration, clearing out the graft and corruption. Strong was a young man, not yet quite forty, and his campaign attracted the attention of the entire country. He had already made a name for himself as a reformer, and his attempt to get elected mayor of the largest city in America was watched by everybody. Even the Hampton *Herald* had stories about it. In ringing speeches he exposed the New York police. He laid bare various corrupt franchise deals, and gave figures he had got hold of to show how prominent bosses and other politicians had fattened on graft.

The climax came when two nights before election, as he was leaving a hall on the East Side, where he had been speaking, somebody tried to shoot him. The bullet struck him over the breast, but by a miracle it hit a book in his overcoat pocket, and only slightly wounded him. However, the attempt was enough to fire the entire city, and even the entire country, with sympathy. He was elected Mayor of New York by a big majority, and way up in Hampton, in a different state, the reporters,

including Peanut, took more interest in his campaign than in the local elections. On election night, of course, the *Herald* office was kept open, and everybody worked sixteen hours that day, from early morning when the polls were opened till late at night, for there was so much figuring to be done, and so many details to be looked after, that a good deal of the next day's paper had to be written and set up the night before.

The next day, on the front page, in head-lines as large as those about the state campaign, the *Herald* announced Russell Strong's election as Mayor of New York.

"Oh, but I'd like to have been a reporter in New York this campaign, and followed Strong around!" Peanut confided to Bill. "There's a regular man for you! Some different from the pinhead politician I had to trail in this state."

"He'll be the next President of the United States if he makes good in New York," said Bill.

"I bet he will, too," Peanut replied.

There were older people than Peanut and Bill who were saying the same thing. In fact, Russell Strong had become the best known man in America, and about the most admired. No sooner was he mayor than everybody began to watch his administration, his fight to clear out the politicians and clean up the city, and papers all over the country began to talk

about him as the logical candidate for president in the next national campaign, two years hence.

That is why, when his health broke down from the strain of his campaign and his wound, he came up to a hunting lodge near Hampton for a rest.

This lodge belonged to a wealthy New Yorker, who put it at Mayor Strong's disposal. It was almost on top of a mountain, in the very centre of a game preserve of 20,000 acres. The mountain had a wide, flattish top a mile across—really a table-land—and the lodge house stood in a forest of hemlocks, with a fenced enclosure near it where moose and other big game were kept in captivity. The lodge was reached by a long, winding road up the mountain, all the way through the preserve (which was called the July Mountain Reservation). In summer it was a beautiful road, running beside a tumbling brook, now through a deep gorge, now climbing up a bare, rocky slope, again winding through deep woods. Peanut knew it well, for he and his Scouts had often climbed it in the old days, the starting point being only five miles from Southmead. This starting point was a tiny little village called East Bentford. It was on a trolley line from Hampton. But from East Bentford up July Mountain to the lodge was almost ten miles, without a house of any sort all the way.

The doctors said what Mayor Strong needed was

complete rest, and so, when they took him up to the lodge, they absolutely forbade any of the score or more of reporters who had followed from New York to come with them. Strong, a nurse, some servants and two doctors motored up the frozen road to the lodge (it was now mid-December, but there was no snow), and left the reporters behind at East Bentford. There the poor reporters had to camp as best they could, quartered around in the houses which would take them to board, and twice a day they called up the lodge on the telephone, and one of the doctors gave them a report. The *Herald* sent a man down, too—Sumner. Peanut was pretty disappointed that he wasn't sent.

"No," said J. S. "I need you here more than sitting down there in East Bentford playing poker all day."

"But I don't play poker, and I could sneak up through the woods to the lodge, and maybe find out what's really going on," Peanut urged. What he wanted, of course, was a sight of the great Strong, who had become a hero in his eyes.

"No, they don't want that—and the *Herald* isn't a peeping Tom kind of yellow journal," said J. S. brusquely, and Peanut accepted the rebuke.

Then came the great blizzard.

December 16th will long be remembered in that part of the world as the date when the great blizzard

began. It began in the morning. The day before had been warm and overcast, and when the snow commenced to fall at breakfast time it fell in huge damp flakes which stuck to everything—trees, wires, poles, bushes. The morning bulletin came in from Sumner all right, over the telephone, and was disquieting. For the first time the doctors reported a change for the worse in Strong's condition. It was said his wife, who had not come with him to July Mountain, had been sent for.

J. S. whistled. "Looks serious," he said.

"The wires'll be down if this keeps on," said Peanut. "It's beginning to freeze now."

"Go do a weather story," said J. S. "Find out how the trains and trolleys are running."

Peanut went out into the storm. It was certainly getting much colder, and the wind was rising. By noon it was blowing a gale, and the streets were deserted. The snow was falling faster and faster, limbs loaded with their heavy weight of ice (for the first wet snow had frozen) cracked off in the parks and squares. Soon the trolleys, in spite of the ploughs, had hard work getting along. All trains were very late. Then, in mid-afternoon, as the telegraphers were taking Associated Press news over the wire, suddenly the instruments stopped!

"Wire's gone somewhere," one of the operators shouted.

A moment later a reporter came out of the telephone booth. "I can't get East Bentford—they say the wire's down," he called to J. S.

Peanut came in at that moment, stamping the snow off his clothes, and beating his numb fingers.

"Train from New York due here at 1:30 they think is stalled somewhere in Connecticut," he announced. "And the trolleys outside the city have given it up for to-day."

J. S. was looking serious and worried.

"This is a pretty state of affairs!" said he. "Well, it's too late to do anything to-day. I want all you men here at 7:30 sharp to-morrow morning."

Peanut kept waking up during the night, the wind howled so, and his room was so cold. Finally he got up to shut the window, though he never slept with his window shut. His bare feet suddenly went into an icy snow-drift in the middle of the floor, and he had to light the gas and shovel it out. When he finally woke up at six thirty o'clock, to the bang of his alarm clock, he saw it was still snowing fiercely, and when he got down-stairs, he saw that there were at least three feet of snow outside, on the level, and it was drifting badly.

"Oh, gee, if I only had my skis here!" he thought. "We'll need 'em to-day, even right in the city."

He ate his breakfast, put on his heaviest storm

boots and thickest clothes, and started out for the office. The walks had not yet been shoveled, and if it had not been that he lived on a trolley line and could wade and plunge out into the lane kept partially open by the snow-ploughs, he could hardly have reached the office at all. As it was, he got there almost on time, and found not more than half the staff present—and those the ones who, like himself, lived on the trolleys. J. S. was there, pretty well exhausted by his efforts, too, for he wasn't very strong. There were no telegraph messages coming in at all. No trains had reached Hampton on either railroad since the noon before. There were no trolleys running outside of the heart of the city. The little group of men in the office looked at each other and laughed in their amazement.

"We might get out a little paper and sell it to ourselves," Cooley laughed.

J. S. was walking back and forth excitedly. "The *Herald* is going to come out this afternoon as usual!" he snapped. "Here, Judd, call up Central, ask for the manager, and find out when they are going to repair the break to East Bentford."

Bill Judd came out of the booth presently. "Manager says they can't do anything till the trolley snow-plough gets through down that line," he announced. "He doesn't know when that will be."

Peanut had been silent all this time. He was

thinking hard. Finally he got up and followed J. S. into his office.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "But I can get the news from East Bentford, I think."

"How? Wireless?" J. S. snapped.

"No, sir," Peanut laughed. "But you remember I know how to ski. They've got skis up at Johnson's sporting goods store. If the paper'll let me buy the right equipment—skis, and shoes and clothes—I can get to East Bentford by noon, or even before, and if they've got any big news, I could get it back here in time for an extra, anyhow. But the chances are the wire to the lodge is down, too, and they haven't anything. I could push on up July Mountain and get the straight dope. They'll be absolutely snowed in up there. None of the reporters at East Bentford will have snow-shoes or skis, and I don't believe there's a pair in the place to borrow. No team could get up the mountain. The drifts'll be thirty feet deep in the gorge. I know that road in winter! I'm about the only person that can make it, sir—if you'll let me try!"

J. S. looked sharply at Peanut. Then he looked out of the window. The snow was still falling, in very fine flakes, driven along by the wind. It was piled up in drifts in the street, and sidewalks were covered again as soon as they were shoveled.

"It's ten miles to Bentford," J. S. said finally,

“and ten miles more to the lodge. You mean to say you can make that to-day, in the face of this storm?”

“I can make Bentford, anyhow,” Peanut replied. “There are houses all along the road. If it’s too bad to tackle the mountain I can wait till morning. It’s a cinch nobody else can get up there ahead of me! That bunch of reporters are snowed in, so they can’t send anywhere for help.”

“Well, it’s worth trying,” J. S. said. “Go on, equip yourself right, and never mind the cost. You know better’n I do what you need. I’ve never been ■ Scout.”

Peanut rushed out happily. In Johnson’s store he was the only customer. He bought first a pair of seven-and-a-half-foot ash skis, the best in the shop, with Norwegian harnesses. Then he bought a pair of high waterproof boots a size and a half too large for him, three pairs of heavy woolen socks, two pairs of heavy woolen gloves and a third pair of fur gloves big enough to go on loosely over the other two, and a woolen pull-down cap which also pulled down over his face with a peep-hole for his eyes. He tested out two pairs of strong ski poles, picked out a sheathed hatchet, and bought two cans of emergency rations and a pair of smoked glasses in case the sun should come out. Then he hurried to the clothing store and got an extra pair of the

heaviest wool underwear, two sweaters and a sheep-skin jacket much too large for him, so it would go on over the sweaters. Staggering under these purchases, he fought his way back to the office, got into all his new clothes, said good-bye to the men in the office, put on his skis (with extra straps in his pocket) on the front steps, and while Bill, J. S. and the rest waved good-bye to him, set off into the storm.

CHAPTER IX

BATTLING WITH THE GREAT BLIZZARD

THE thermometer that morning was five above zero, which wasn't so very cold for this mountain country, but the stinging, searching wind made it seem far colder, and Peanut was glad to pull his cap down over his face. His feet and hands were warm, thanks to the many gloves and socks, and he did not suffer. He took the middle of the road, where the snow-ploughs had been, and got a mile or two out of the heart of the city without any great difficulty, except the loss of breath from the wind. Then he ran into the big drifts, and left the snow-plough tracks behind.

Without skis or snow-shoes it would have been utterly impossible to go farther, for he came upon drifts ten feet deep, some of them with banks so sharp that he had to side-step around them to get to the top. As he went along, he watched the telephone wire beside the road to see, if possible, where the break was. There didn't seem to be any poles down on this line for some distance. They were new poles, and weren't carrying many wires, so

there hadn't been much weight on them. He struggled on slowly, till he knew he was only three miles from East Bentford. Then he came upon the break, or a break. Two poles were down, and all the wires snapped. But, he noted, the end of the wire had not grounded. It was broken close to an insulator. There was a house near by, on the Hampton side of the break, and Peanut went up to the door. It was a farmhouse, and against the front door was a drift above the top panel. Peanut went around to the back. Here he saw that the farmer had shoveled away the snow from the back stoop, and then had cut a tunnel through a ten-foot drift to reach the barn! The man himself was just coming out of the tunnel, on his way back to the house. He looked up and saw Peanut, on skis, four or five feet above his head!

"Hello, where in Sam Hill did you come from?" he said.

"Hampton," Peanut replied. "You got a 'phone?"

"Yes."

"Is it working?"

"We can get Hampton, but nothin' on the other side," the farmer replied. "Want to talk?"

"Not yet," Peanut replied. "I may. Thanks."

"Say, them things seem to keep you up," the man remarked. "Wish I had a pair."

"You need 'em, if you are going calling to-day."

Peanut laughed, as he drove in his poles, and started for the road again.

He had left Hampton at nine o'clock, and he reached East Bentford at one—four hours to go ten miles.

"Gee," he thought, "without this wind to fight, and the drifts, I could have made it in two!"

The telephone which the reporters used in the tiny village was in the general store and post-office, and Peanut fancied the crowd would be in there, for he saw that people had broken out the sidewalks a little. So he made for it at once. The door was shut, of course, and nobody was on the street. He took off his skis carefully, at the side of the store, slid them in under a drift completely out of sight, and then entered.

The little store was crowded with men, who all looked up as Peanut entered.

"Hello, Peanut! For the love of Mike, how did you get here?" cried Sumner, recognizing him.

"Walked," said Peanut. "J. S. sent me to find out why you hadn't sent any news since yesterday morning."

"Sent any news?" Sumner cried. "How could I? There's no way of sending it, and no news to send. We can't get the lodge on the 'phone, or any other place."

"And we can't get six feet out of this hole of a

hamlet, either—not a pair of snow-shoes in the place," some other reporter grumbled. "Say, kid, how did you get here, honest?"

"Walked, I tell you," Peanut laughed.

He had thought he was going to be embarrassed by all these New York reporters, but now that he saw them huddled helpless in the little store, and realized that he had the jump on them all, he wasn't embarrassed a bit. He called Sumner aside, and asked him where some luncheon was to be had right away.

"Come over to my palatial hotel," Sumner replied. "We have dinner here at twelve, such as it is—food is getting scarce. But the egg supply still holds out. If the storm keeps on, I'll begin to cackle."

Peanut dug his skis from their hiding-place, while the crowd watched in the doorway.

"Let's take 'em away from him," somebody cried.

Peanut laughed. "A lot of good they'd do you if you did," said he. "There isn't a one of you knows the way to the lodge, and in this storm you'd last about an hour."

"We could follow the telephone wire."

"Yes you could!" Peanut retorted. "Half the way or more it's strung on trees through the woods, and don't run on the road at all. You'd lose it before you got a mile."

"Ain't he the smart little Rube?" one of the men sneered. "Sort of a Boy Scout reporter."

"That's just what I am!" Peanut retorted, hotly.

"Shut up, Tom," another man said, to the first speaker. "He's our only hope, unless a train gets in pretty quick over there at Bentford, and they send us some snow-shoes from New York."

"Yes, and who'll go over to Bentford for the shoes?" Tom replied.

"My paper'll have sense enough to send somebody who can use 'em," the other said. Then he turned to Peanut, who was already starting away with Sumner, and shouted above the howl of the wind, "Say, wake us up if you get back at night, and give us all the news!" he said.

Peanut looked at him and laughed. "After I've sent it to my paper, I will," he replied—"maybe."

Sumner took him across the street to a small house, where the woman hastily made him some coffee and fried him some eggs and a piece of ham.

"If Strong's dead," said Sumner, "how are you going to get the news back to the *Herald*? This storm's not over yet, and it'll be another twenty-four hours at least before they get a plough through or the wires up."

"Don't worry," Peanut replied. "I know how I'll get the news in, all right. All that's worrying me is the fear a train'll get through to Bentford, and

bring those guys snow-shoes, or else somebody will dig up a pair around here. There must be some farmers who have 'em not far off. I got to beat 'em up to the lodge and back."

"None of 'em could make the lodge in this storm, could they?" asked Sumner. "It must be drifted fierce up there. Do you think you can make it yourself?"

Peanut grit his teeth. "I'm *goin'* to make it!" he declared. "But this storm'll quit before night. The wind's shifting west. I know the signs. If Strong's dead, and they get a man up there in the morning, he could get back in time to spoil our afternoon beat. Oh, golly, I hope Strong isn't dead! I hope he's getting better!"

"Well, go to it, Peanut," Sumner said, as the young reporter put on his sweaters and coat and cap again, and shoved his feet into the precious skis, which he had brought into the kitchen of the house, so great was his fear that somebody would steal them.

"I got to hustle, and make it before dark," Peanut said. "It's ten miles, all up-hill. Thank goodness I know the way."

It was half-past one when he set off again. His legs were already weary from the hard trip down from Hampton, for it was his first ski run of the winter, and his muscles were unused to the work.

But the excitement made him forget all that, as he struck off east across a little level plain, toward the ramparts of July Mountain which could be dimly seen through the white haze of the driving snow. He realized that this snow was now coming as much from the ground as from the sky—the worst of the storm was over, or, at least, the snowfall was over. The blowing of the loose snow on the ground, however, continued with unabated fury.

But the wind was west, and he was going east, and he thanked his lucky stars for that. He didn't have the stinging blast in his face, and the gale helped his progress instead of hindering it. The road across the plain was quite invisible. Even the fences in most places were covered up, except where the wind had blown a place almost bare. But he had the small telephone poles, which carried the single wire to the lodge, as a guide, and he was soon at the foot of the mountain where the reservation began.

Here the road entered the woods, and it could be easily followed by the gap between the trees. That, however, was the only sign. The snow lay four feet deep on the level here, and was drifted wherever the wind found a chance to pile it into great mounds of hard, packed surface that gave little grip to a ski runner.

Now the hard work began for Peanut, for the

road was ascending sharply all the time. He dug in his poles, and climbed straight whenever he could, zigzagging where it was too steep for straight climbing. The undrifted snow was very dry and powdery, and he sank in six inches or more, making climbing hard work and progress slow.

He went on in this fashion for a couple of miles, till he reached the mouth of the gorge, where the road and the brook beside it (now hidden completely under the snow) went up between two sharp walls of rock at least seventy-five feet high. Here Peanut drew in his breath with a sharp whistle of astonishment.

The rock wall on the north side of the gorge was bare of trees, and the high wind had swept the snow over the crest steadily now for two days, and had filled the gorge solid with snow! The vast drift, seventy-five feet high, rose in front of Peanut like a white precipice, and almost as steep. To left and right were thick trees, and rock walls. Somehow that great drift had to be climbed. If he went around it, he would have to make a long, slow detour through the woods, and lose valuable time. Beside, he might lose the road altogether in this weather.

He set his teeth, took both poles in his right hand, faced right himself, and tried the side of the drift. The angle was close to 70° , and he could not have

side-stepped up it had not the snow been packed so hard that it didn't give way under his weight. Testing each step, and leaning in against the bank, he worked up, step by step, to the top, drew a deep breath, paused to get back his wind, and then resumed his journey, walking at this point over snow seventy-five feet deep!

Of course, this drift didn't last long. On the upper side of the gorge it slipped down to the four foot level again, and he had the relief of a very short slide. Then the toilsome climb was renewed, now through woods, now across open fields or up bare slopes where the icy wind howled and he had no means whatever of telling the trail, except his own instinct. He could see that the snow had ceased falling now. It was even growing much lighter in the west. But the wind still blew so that the air was full of a blinding white mist. He kept the trail across the open spaces largely by the feel of the wind at his back, and the prevalent line of the drifts. He knew they had drifted from the northwest, and as he was to go due east, he could cut the drifts and wind ruffs at an angle and keep the trail fairly well, though several times, on the far side of a clearing, he had to skirt the forest wall for a while to find the cut between the trees where the road went into the forest again.

After battling on for two hours more, Peanut be-

gan to feel the strain, in spite of his excitement. He wasn't cold, in fact, he was actually hot and sweaty from the exertion of climbing and pushing through the unbroken snow ; but his legs suddenly felt as if they were independent of the rest of his body and had gone on a strike, and his head had begun to ache.

He decided that he'd have to take a rest, so he crawled into the shelter of a thick stand of young hemlocks, where the wind scarcely penetrated, stamped down the snow, and on the packed surface made a fire of dry, dead wood. Then he took off his skis, put them side by side, and lay down on them wearily. It was good to stretch out, and the heat of the fire on his face was good, too. He began to grow drowsy. Presently he nodded off, and woke with a start when his body slipped from the skis. He tugged out his watch in fright, to see how long he had slept, and drew a great sigh of relief when he saw it had only been five minutes. But he couldn't afford to run such a risk again, so he got up, threw snow on his fire, buckled his skis on again, and started once more up the trail.

The rest, brief as it was, had refreshed him, and he managed to push on for a mile without stopping. The west was clear now, and the low sun suddenly shone out and sent long shadows ahead of him, through the veil of blown snow powder. But it was

also getting colder. Once, when he had to turn into the wind for a few hundred feet on a sharp bend of the trail, he realized that if he had been going west instead of east for the ten miles he never could have made it. As it was, he had to pause again and rest in another hemlock thicket. But he did not lie down this time.

About two miles from the lodge the trail plunged into a thick forest of young evergreen, not to emerge into the open again till the house was reached. It was getting dark now, and as Peanut went in under the trees he seemed to be entering a tunnel.

"Gosh, I hope I can keep the trail in here!" he thought to himself.

Looking down, it was hard to keep it already, but looking up, he could see where it ran by the slit of sky between the tree tops. Every few rods he was delayed by a tree blown across the roadway, which he had to climb—not always an easy job with skis on one's feet. He also realized what the storm must have done to the telephone wire, which was strung on trees. It grew darker and darker as he wearily pushed on, almost exhausted now, but fighting grimly and driving one leg in front of the other by sheer will power. As the sky grew darker, it became more and more difficult to keep the trail, and finally he thought he had lost it altogether—when

suddenly, before him through the trees, he caught a gleam of light.

The lodge at last!

His aching arms drove in his ski poles with renewed energy, and in five minutes he was climbing the open slope in front of the lodge house.

CHAPTER X

A HERO PASSES IN THE NIGHT

AND at that moment he saw something which sent his heart down to his boots. One of the gamekeepers was coming from an outbuilding on snow-shoes, dragging a hand-sled loaded with wood behind him! Why hadn't Peanut thought before that of course the gamekeepers up here would have snow-shoes? If Strong died, they could get out with the news as well as he could!

"No, not as well," he added to himself. "It's down-hill. If it comes to a race, skis would beat 'em."

His spirits rose again, and he called to the man, who had not seen him because nobody looked westward into the snow-laden wind if he could help it.

"Hello, where in the Dickens did you come from?" the gamekeeper said, as Peanut came up, looking at him as if he were a ghost.

"I came up the mountain. I'm a reporter."

"You did? Ain't you all in?"

"Pretty near it," Peanut admitted. "How's Mr. Strong? Everybody's worried."

"You'll have to ask the doctors that. We aren't

allowed to talk. Come in, young feller. You need ~~some~~ food and rest, I reckon. Say, that ~~were~~ some trip to-day!"

Peanut took off his precious skis and brought them into the house with him. The door opened from a storm porch into a huge living-room, hung with moose heads and carpeted with bearskins. An enormous fire in the six foot high fireplace walloped up the chimney. The lamps were lighted. Supper was just being set out on a table. The room was so warm, and smelled so good of burning wood and cooking food, that Peanut, as he sank into a chair, very nearly dropped to sleep while he was waiting for the gamekeeper to return with one of the doctors.

When the doctor finally came, in fact, Peanut was half dozing, and the physician looked at him sharply.

"You came up the mountain in this storm?" he asked, incredulous.

Peanut roused his faculties. "Yes, sir," he said. "I walked down from Hampton this morning, and up here this afternoon. All the wires are down everywhere, and no trains or trolleys running. I've got to find out how Mr. Strong is."

"We'll talk about him later. Take off those shoes and your sweaters. You can't go back to-night, that's sure."

While Peanut was getting off some of his snow-soaked outer clothes, the doctor went to the fire and poured a cup of hot water from the kettle on the crane. He dropped in a pinch of tea, and brought the brew back to Peanut.

"Drink this," he said. "Now, curl up on that couch and snooze till dinner. We'll call you."

The reporter needed no second invitation. He was asleep before his head had hit the cushion.

He was waked up presently by the doctor shaking him.

"Dinner," said the man.

Peanut sat down with the two doctors and the head gamekeeper, who lived in the lodge house. All three were very sober and grave. The dinner consisted of canned soup, canned vegetables, and fresh venison pie. There was plenty of fresh milk, too.

"No, we aren't suffering. We've plenty to eat," the doctor said, in reply to Peanut's question. "You say all wires are down, and no trains running?"

"There hadn't any trains got through at nine o'clock this morning," Peanut replied. "I don't believe any will, either, till this drifting stops. Please tell me how Mr. Strong is."

"How's the trail up the mountain?" asked the gamekeeper, as the doctors were silent.

"Fierce," said Peanut. "The drift in the gorge

is right up level with the top of the north wall. Must be seventy-five feet deep. I just managed to side-step up it 'cause it was packed so hard. But you couldn't get up it in a team to save your soul, or down it, either."

Both doctors were frowning. "We'll be frank with you," they said. "The Mayor is very low. His heart has failed. We sent for his wife yesterday morning. He's too sick to move, even if it were possible to move him. If his wife had been able to get here, he would have been happier. That's worried him. He's a martyr to New York City—you can put that in your paper."

"Oh!" cried Peanut, "can't I go back and get something, or somebody, to help! He mustn't die. He's—he's such a great man!"

The doctors shook their heads. "No," one of them said, "everything that can be done for him we are able to do. He would have been just as sick if he'd stayed in New York. We wish his wife could have got here, that's all."

They went back to the Mayor's chamber after dinner, and Peanut sat with the gamekeeper.

"I don't know how we'll get him, and these doctors and the nurse and the servants down the mountain, and over that drift," the gamekeeper mused.

"You mean he's going to *die*?" cried Peanut.

"Sh—not so loud. Couldn't you tell from the

way they talked? He's been unconscious since four o'clock. They don't expect he'll live till morning."

"Oh, he mustn't die, he *mustn't!*" the boy exclaimed.

"That's something you and I have little to say about," the man replied. "It's hard sometimes to see why the good men are taken and the crooks and rascals left to live till they're ninety. The older you get, the more you wonder. Death, my boy, is the strangest fact we have to face in this world, and the one we all *do* have to face."

"I—I never thought much about it," Peanut answered.

"I reckon not. You're a kid yet. Now you curl up on that couch again for the night, and put one of those bearskins from the floor over you. I'm going to get some more wood."

"Let me help you."

"No, I reckon you've done enough for to-day," the man smiled. "You hit the hay."

Peanut lay down, his muscles aching, and soon dozed off. But he slept fitfully, vaguely aware that the doctors came and went in the room, that the nurse came in, too, down the stairs from the sleeping rooms above. There was a strange atmosphere of gloom in the house, accentuated during the early hours of the night by the mournful howl and whistle

of the wind outside. After midnight the wind seemed to die down.

It seemed to Peanut that it must be nearly daylight when he woke with a start, out of a troubled dream in which he was standing beside Mayor Strong on a platform, before a vast throng, and saw a man fire a revolver at the Mayor. He was hurling himself at the assassin and just snatching the pistol from his grasp as he woke up.

A lamp was still burning in the room, and the fire was burning brightly, too. The two doctors and the nurse were coming down the stairs. Their faces were plain in the red glow from the fire, and Peanut could see that they were very solemn. A foreboding smote him, and suddenly a cold shiver went down his spine, and his legs felt weak and shaky. He threw off the heavy bearskin and got up.

"Is—is ——" he began.

"Mayor Strong died at five o'clock," said one of the doctors, in a low tone.

"Oh!" cried Peanut. "Oh!"

He didn't think for the moment of his story, of getting out with the news. He only thought of the splendid man up there in the room above, his great work over, his noble life sacrificed to his city.

"May—may I see him once before I go?" Peanut suddenly asked. He wanted to look at the face of the man he had so much admired.

The doctors looked at each other and whispered.

“Yes,” one of them finally said, and led the way.

Peanut entered the chamber and gazed at the handsome, still face on the pillow. The dead man seemed to be sleeping.

“He—he looks happy,” Peanut whispered.

“He was a noble, good man,” the doctor answered. “He was my oldest friend. You admired him, didn’t you?”

“Oh, yes! more than anybody in America!”

The doctor put his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Always admire men like Strong,” he said, “and you’ll never be ashamed of what you do yourself.”

Then they went out of the chamber.

Down-stairs the other doctor had written out a statement which he handed to Peanut. “This is an official statement of the facts,” he said. “We’ll have to depend on you to send the news. Will you give it to the Associated Press?”

“The A. P. man in Hampton will get it from our paper,” said Peanut. “Now what do you want me to do about getting snow-shoes and things back up here to you?”

“The gamekeeper will attend to that. He’s starting after breakfast.”

“You’ll have to bring the—the body down on a sledge, won’t you?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, “as soon as we can get

the men and the snow-shoes. There are only three pairs here, the gamekeeper's, and his two assistants'."

Peanut said nothing more. He realized that if he were to get a "beat" on the other papers, he would have to reach a telephone before the gamekeeper got to East Bentford and told all the reporters, for by this time, surely, they would have found some way to get out. He simply asked for a glass of milk at the kitchen door. The cook, however, gave him a couple of eggs from the servants' table, which he ate hastily. Then he pulled on his extra socks again, laced his boots, donned his sweaters, and in spite of the doctors, who urged him not to leave while it was still dark, he buckled on his skis and set off.

CHAPTER XI

PEANUT BEATS THE WHOLE COUNTRY

IT was stinging cold, but the wind had abated, and the snow was no longer drifting. Though still dark, the east was slightly rosy, and as the ground was white he could dimly make out the trail. Moreover, as the first two miles were in thick woods, the wind had not obliterated his last night's tracks, and he found the going easy on that account. His feet fitted into the ruts. By the time he broke out of the woods again it was daylight. The rising sun sent red and pink shadows out over the wind-ribbed snow ahead of him, and the west wind, still strong enough to take his breath when he breasted its full sweep, was stinging cold. He pulled his cap down over his face and hurried on.

"I must beat the gamekeeper by two hours," he kept telling himself.

Four miles from the lodge the road began to descend more steeply, and Peanut could slide. He began to make fast time now. It wasn't long before he came to the head of the gorge, and hurried over the top of the mighty drift.

At the other end, on the brow of the seventy-five foot snow precipice, he stopped and looked over. What was the best way down? To go around meant a slow detour through a tangle of trees, rocks and shrubs, taking twenty minutes at least. To side-step down would be slow work, too, and if he slipped he would probably bring a baby avalanche down behind him and bury himself at the bottom. Could he run it? Never, even in his dreams, had he run so steep a slope!

But it was no time now to lose heart!

He shoved his sheathed hatchet farther around on his belt, where it wouldn't hurt him if he fell, raised his cap from his face so he would have a clear vision, dropped into the Telemark position, fixed his eyes hard on the spot at the bottom where the road went on down the mountain, and let himself go. If he missed that opening between the trees at the bottom he realized that his chances were slim, for he would be dashed against a tree, and for a second his heart went down into his boots and he felt sick.

It was as nearly like falling seventy-five feet through the air as anything could be, and not be the real thing. A cloud of snow flew up in front of him from the bow of his ski runners. He was powdered white, and almost blinded, and every bit of breath seemed to leave his body. But he held

his course, he kept his eyes on the break in the trees, and flew on, between the trees, down the open roadway. Just below the gorge there was a sharp bend in the road, and he hit this at a mile a minute pace, it seemed to him. If the snow had not been deep and soft he couldn't have made the turn, but his forward ski bit deep in the powder, and with a wrench that made his leg ache he threw himself into a Telemark swing and came around.

Then his pace slackened. The hill was less steep now, and he soon lost the great momentum the steep drift wall had given him. He came up to a normal position, wiped the snow from his face and eyes, drew a deep breath, and slid on at a comfortable pace, under easy control. Presently the incline grew still less steep, and he had to take a shove or two every few steps to keep moving. He looked back up the road, and realized that if he had been racing with anybody on snow-shoes he would have left them far behind in that last mile!

His descent had been so rapid, in fact, that in fifteen minutes more he came out on the border of the East Bentford plain.

Here he stopped, and thought. If he went to the village, all the reporters would be there, questioning him, and even if the telephone was working he could hardly use it without being overheard. Besides, he doubted if the break would have been re-

paired yet. So he turned north and struck out across the open fields, without going any nearer the village. The snow was over the fences, so he had no trouble in walking. When he was a mile or more north of the town, he turned west again and reached the road to Hampton, down which he had come the day before. The trolley plough had not yet got through, nor had any team of any sort. There wasn't a track in the road, not even his own ski tracks. The wind had drifted them under.

"The telephone isn't mended yet!" he cried aloud. "Hooray! I've got 'em cold!"

He hurried on till he reached the farmhouse where he had made the inquiry the previous day, and climbed down the drift by the back door, took off his skis, and knocked.

The farmer himself opened the door.

"Hello, come back, did yer?" he said. "What's the news? Seen the butcher or the mail man or the trolley comin' this way?"

"Not a track in the road yet," Peanut replied. "Can I use your 'phone now, to Hampton?"

"Got ten cents?"

"I'm a reporter for the *Herald*," said Peanut. "I'll reverse the call."

With fingers trembling with excitement, he rang the bell and called his number.

"Yes, yes, this is Peanut," he said, when the

'phone ~~was~~ answered. "Yes, I got there, and I'm back. Lemme have J. S. first.

"Hello, Mr. Sawyer?" the farmer heard him continue. "Mayor Strong's dead. Yes—five o'clock this morning. I got a statement from the doctors—yes, signed. I got there last night, and stayed all night. Came down now, fast as I could. No, I'm not at East Bentford. I didn't go there. Nobody knows I'm back. The wire's still down to East Bentford. I'm three miles up on your side of the break. I saw where it was yesterday. Give me Bill Judd to dictate to, please, will you? And say, Mr. Sawyer, after our special edition is out, may Bill send the story for me to the New York *Evening Transcript*? They don't have A. P. service. The A. P.'ll get it from our edition, won't they? Sure, I thought so. But the doctors would like the *Transcript* to have the story, too, I guess. Is there any wire open to New York?"

Here he listened for a moment.

"'Round through Albany?" the farmer heard him go on. "Oh, will you? Thanks, Mr. Sawyer! What? Wait a minute."

"What's this number?" he asked the farmer, turning from the 'phone.

"Hello, 74 J North Bentford. Yes, I'll wait here for orders. I can get back up the mountain and do a piece about bringing the body down, if you want.

Guess there'll not be many of that New York crowd who can get up there."

He waited again with the receiver to his ear, and a moment later he called, "Hello, Bill, that you? Yes, I'm all right. Pretty near all in last night, though. Gee, yes, it's terrible. He was a great man. I can't tell you how I feel over a 'phone, though. Ready?"

Here Peanut began to tell the story of Mayor Strong's last days, as he had got it from the doctors. He told the hour he died, what the doctor had said about his being a martyr to New York, and dictated word for word the doctors' statement, which he had brought in his pocket. Then he described the road down from the lodge, with the vast snow-drift in the gorge, and told how the gamekeeper was setting out to get snow-shoes and help in order to bring the body down on a sledge.

"You'll have to get the railroad to tell you if Mrs. Strong's train has got through yet," he added. "I've done all I can for now. J. S. is going to get out an early extra, he says. You fix up the yarn good, Bill. And say, J. S. says you may send the story by wire to the New York *Evening Transcript* as soon 's our edition is out. They don't have the A. P. service, you know, and the other New York papers would beat 'em cold if we don't tip 'em off. Do it for me, will you, Bill? Maybe it'll give me a

chance to get to New York. It's the best chance I'll ever have, anyhow. Good. You're a regular feller."

Peanut hung up the receiver, and sank wearily back in the chair. He felt suddenly weak and dizzy, and the farmer's wife, who had come into the room while he was talking, now came to him with a cup of tea.

"I guess you want somethin' to eat and drink," she said.

Peanut looked up at her, and took the cup. "Thank you," he said. "I do feel sort of fagged. I did some hustling to get here."

"Yes, and you've been excited," she said, bringing him a plate of doughnuts. "So Mayor Strong's dead? Poor man, we wuz talkin' about him, my husband and me, only this mornin', wonderin' how he stood the storm up there. I guess he was a pretty fine man."

"He was a *great* man!" Peanut exclaimed. "I —I saw him after he was dead, this morning. They let me look. It was the only time I ever saw him. I shall never forget it."

"You're over young to be lookin' ~~on~~ sech sights," the woman declared.

"He's a reporter, Mary. I calc'late reporters have to see about everything," said the farmer.

"I guess they do," Peanut agreed. "It's ~~a~~ exciting life, sometimes."

"And not much like farmin'," said the man.

"Well, you go set by the stove till they want yer agin," declared the woman. "And take off some o' them wet duds. Here, give 'em to me. I'll dry 'em."

Peanut laughed, but it was rather nice to be mothered, and he was soon curled up in a rocking-chair by the stove, very sleepy, and nodding off.

But his nap was interrupted by the ring of the telephone.

"Yes, it's me—I. Can I get back to East Bentford? Sure! No, I'm not too tired. It was fairly easy coming down this morning. Yes, I'll wait there till the gamekeeper goes back, and go back with him, and do the story. Tell Sumner what? Oh, the plough's on its way down, is it? They'll get the break mended before night, then. Yes, I'll stay with the folks on the mountain and 'phone the story as soon as we get down. Don't know when it will be. No—I'm all right, honest. What do you think I am, a girl? Say, I've been a Boy Scout for six years! Yep—good-bye."

"I'll see that my call is reversed, and charged to the *Herald*," said Peanut to his hosts, "and thank you for your help—and the doughnuts."

"You got to hev more'n them before you set out again," the woman declared, bustling in from the kitchen with some eggs and bacon on a plate, and

cup of steaming coffee. "It's noon, and time fer some lunch."

"Say, you're awful good to me," said Peanut.

"Ma's glad to see somebody, after three days o' bein' snow-bound," the man laughed. "She'd even be glad to see the tax collector!"

As soon as his lunch was eaten, the reporter buckled on his skis again, said farewell to these kind people, and set out down the road. The snow-plough had not yet come in sight, but the wind had nearly ceased, and he knew it would soon get through now.

As he plodded along, he wondered if the game-keeper had arrived yet at East Bentford with the news, and, if he had, what the reporters had done about getting it to their papers. He didn't care now! By this time the *Herald* extra was on the streets of Hampton—beating the entire country. He, Peanut, had got a beat on every paper in New York! Furthermore, his story by now had been wired by Bill to the *Evening Transcript* in New York and also had been sent to all the country by the Associated Press man in Hampton, who would have copied it out of the *Herald*. Before these reporters in East Bentford could get to a wire, the news would be stale. Peanut and his skis had beaten them all!

"And who'd have thought when I learned to ski

so the Wildcat Patrol could have a good time that it would be the means of getting the big beat of the season?" he thought. "If I hadn't been a Scout, I never could have pulled this off."

CHAPTER XII

THE STRANGE PROCESSION DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

BEFORE he had reached the little general store in East Bentford Peanut realized that the news was out, for he saw a crowd of men gathered in front of the store, around a cutter to which were hitched a span of horses. In front of it stood another sleigh, a wood sled, with four horses. As he came rapidly up, he saw that the gamekeeper was there, on his snow-shoes, directing operations, while half a dozen village men, with snow shovels, were getting ready to ride on the sledge. There were only three of the reporters evidently going on this expedition, and all the rest were trying to talk to these three at once. Nobody, for a moment, noticed Peanut as he came silently up.

Suddenly the man who had called him a "Boy Scout reporter" spied him, and shouted to the rest.

"There he is!" he cried. "Say, where've you been, kid?"

"I've been telephoning the story to my paper," said Peanut. "An extra's on the street by now, and the A. P. has the yarn. There's a wire open to New York via Albany."

"And I'm stung!" cried another man.

"Now I guess the old *Transcript* will wish it hadn't rowed with the A. P.," somebody else said to him. "You're beaten, all right."

"Are you from the *Transcript*?" asked Peanut.

"Yes—we don't have the A. P. service. We have a news service of our own."

"I know it," Peanut replied. "That's why I had my yarn wired to your paper as soon as the *Herald* was out. I guess maybe we caught the one wire before the A. P. man got in on it."

The *Transcript* reporter looked at Peanut a moment in astonished silence, and then he rushed to him and grasped his hand. "You're all to the good, kid," he said. "Say, Jones, how about this Boy Scout reporter now, eh?"

Jones turned away disgusted, and Sumner, coming up close to Peanut, slapped him on the back and whispered, "We've put one over on these metropolitan guys this time, all right!"

Jones wheeled around suddenly. "How's he done all this, I'd like to know?" he demanded. "He's not had time to get up to Hampton and back. How do we know he's not stringing us?"

Peanut laughed. "You don't," he said. But he added in a low tone to the *Transcript* man, "I knew where the break was in the telephone wire, and went up beyond it. I'm on the level."

"Well, well, you chaps, who's going on these sleds?" the gamekeeper broke in. "Three of you are all that can go. Have you decided yet?"

"You're not going to try to *drive* up to the lodge, are you?" Peanut asked.

"No, we're going to break out the road to Bent-ford and get some snow-shoes there. Say, you took that drift straight, didn't you? Wonder you didn't break your neck!"

"How'd you get down it?" Peanut asked.

"I took one look, and made the detour around," said the gamekeeper. "Come on, boys, are we ready?"

The gamekeeper, a driver, and the Associated Press reporter and one of the village men with a snow shovel got into the cutter. The *Transcript* man, one other reporter, and the rest of the snow shovelers got aboard the wood sled, which led the way, and the procession started off, up the unbroken road. The horses foundered nearly to their bellies in the snow, and before they had gone two hundred yards the men were out, shoveling a cut through a drift. Peanut walked alongside for a short distance, and then returned to the store.

"They've got only three miles to go, but it's going to take 'em some while," he said to Sumner. "The snow-plough 'll be here from Hampton before they get back."

Peanut joined the group of reporters in the store, and told them about his trip and Mayor Strong's death. Some of the men had known Strong personally, and all of them had heard him speak. As they talked of him, they grew very sober, and soberer still when they talked of his wife, snow-bound somewhere in the train from New York unable to get to him, and not knowing whether he was dead or alive.

"Poor woman!" thought Peanut, and he wished there was something he could do to help her.

It was nearly dark when the snow-plough got in from Hampton, followed a few minutes later by the expedition which had broken out the road to Bentford. The gamekeeper climbed out of the cutter, with five pairs of snow-shoes under his arms. On the sled Peanut saw a long pine box and a big toboggan.

"Hi, where are *our* snow-shoes?" cried several reporters, crowding up to the three who had gone to Bentford.

Those men looked disgusted. "There were only five pairs to be rounded up in the whole place," they said, "and the gamekeeper says he's got to have 'em all. The train's in, by the way, and Mrs. Strong is at Bentford. She's going to stay there to-night. They'll have a special train up to-morrow to take the body to New York."

"Thunder, that means the kid 'll get ■ beat on the rest of the story, I suppose," somebody growled. "Bringing down the body on a sledge is going to make a good story."

"The trolley's running now—why don't you all go up to Hampton and get snow-shoes?" said Peanut. "You better get some fit clothes to wear, too," he added.

"I've not seen any trolley yet—only a plough," sneered Jones. "And that was going the other way."

"Well, with the road open, if you can't find some way to get ten miles and back before to-morrow, you New York guys aren't so much!" Peanut laughed. Then he turned to the gamekeeper. "Can I help you?" he asked. "Are you going up to-night? There's a moon."

"I'm going up moon or no moon," the man replied. "Sure, you can help. We need you."

The coffin box was now lashed firmly on the toboggan, and a long rope attached, with an extra coil carried along to haul the load up the drift. Five of the youngest and strongest of the East Bentford men were selected, and with Peanut and the gamekeeper they laid hold on the rope and began the journey.

"How are the doctors going to get down?" asked Peanut.

"We've got a couple more pairs of shoes up there for them," the gamekeeper replied. "There was a time when everybody had shoes around here, but since the farmers got their lumber cut off, nobody seems to use 'em much, and we couldn't rake up a single pair here in East Bentford. As for those ski things you wear, I never saw a pair of them before. They must be all right on the down-hill."

"They are—but they're little use in the thick woods," said Peanut. "I wonder if those reporters 'll get any snow-shoes in Hampton? The stores 'll be shut up to-night."

"Somebody 'll open up for 'em," said the gamekeeper. "But they'll have to start early in the morning to meet us!"

The seven men took turns hauling the toboggan, five pulling at a time, and two breaking trail. It was growing dark rapidly now, and the moon was not yet up, but the trail was fairly easy to follow because of the deep tracks made that morning by the gamekeeper and Peanut. The moon came up above the trees just as they reached the great wall of the drift.

"Whew! did I slide down there?" Peanut exclaimed, as he gazed at the steep white wall, which looked twice as high and steep in the pale moonlight.

"According to your tracks, you did. Now, how are we going to get this load up?"

"Give me the long rope," said Peanut. "I can side-step up it, while you folks on snow-shoes go around by the detour. Then we can haul the toboggan straight up."

"Make sure the box is on fast first," the gamekeeper cautioned. They examined the ropes, and then struck off into the woods to the left, while Peanut, taking the end of the long rope, began cautiously to side-step up the side of the drift. Two or three times it seemed to be giving way under him, and he nearly slid back to the bottom, where he would have been buried in snow. But by jamming in his poles and leaning hard against the wall he contrived to reach the top. There he waited till the rest appeared, and then all seven of them heaved at the rope and slowly brought the toboggan and its load up over the edge. They plodded on in the clear, cold moonlight, through woods and clearings, hardly speaking a word, for there was something about the grim load they were hauling and the icy stillness of the snow-buried night forest which made them very solemn. They all jumped once, nervously, even the gamekeeper, when a wildcat screamed close to the trail.

"He's after a deer," the gamekeeper muttered.
"Drat him!"

"Would he kill a deer?" asked Peanut.

"They'll attack anything when the snow's as deep as this," the keeper replied.

At that the five other men and Peanut began to walk faster!

It was midnight when the expedition reached the lodge. One of the doctors was sleeping in the big living-room. The other had gone to bed.

"We start at four o'clock," the gamekeeper announced, laconically. "Come get some supper, men, and you too, kid."

Out in the kitchen a sleepy cook roused from a chair and gave them venison pie and coffee. Then they all turned in under bearskin rugs on the couches in the living-room and caught what sleep they could.

At four o'clock the keeper waked everybody. They had a hasty breakfast, and then the two doctors led four of the men up-stairs and they solemnly brought down the long pine box, heavy now with its sad load. Everybody stood with bared head while the box was placed on the toboggan, outside the door, two servants holding lanterns, and later they spoke in whispers as it was made fast with ropes and straps. The doctors then bundled up in their fur coats and Peanut helped them fasten on their snow-shoes.

"We've been practicing on these contraptions

yesterday," one of them said. "I guess we ~~can~~ get along."

Their necessary hand baggage was tied on a small sled, which they were to pull behind them. The servants were left behind, and the nurse, too. They stood in the doorway, and an old man who had been Mayor Strong's body servant for years was almost weeping. "Please let me go with him!" he cried. "I must help Mrs. Strong now!"

The doctors spoke to him kindly. "You couldn't make this trip, James," they said. "It's too hard. To-morrow the keeper will get you all down ~~on~~ sleds. You must be patient."

But still the old fellow begged with tears in his eyes.

At five o'clock the procession started. The moon had set, and it was pitch dark save for a glimmer of starlight in the white world. Fortunately, it was not very cold. The thermometer stood at five above zero. Peanut and the gamekeeper went ahead by turns to break trail, each carrying a lantern. However, breaking trail was easy now, for their tracks from the night before were not drifted in much—not at all in the woods. It was merely a question of keeping to them by the aid of the lantern. Behind, following the lanterns, came the men dragging the toboggan, and then the two doctors, dragging their little sled. It was a strange procession, winding over the deep snow, through the pitch black forest,

led by two bobbing lanterns. Once they heard the scream of the wildcat—but that was the only sound save the mournful whisper of the pines, the plop of snow as it fell from wind-shaken branches, and the whispers of the men.

Peanut was deeply moved.

"I guess this is as solemn a funeral ~~as a man~~ could have," he thought.

They plodded on steadily for an hour, making good time ■ the packed trail was easy to walk in, and the loads dragged easily down-hill. Even the doctors, unused as they were to snow-shoeing, kept up. Then the keeper ordered ■ rest for ten minutes.

It was still dark when the march was resumed, and dark when they came to the head of the great drift. Peanut and the keeper stopped abruptly with their lanterns, and peered over the brink.

"Somebody's got to get down there and signal when the load reaches the bottom," said the man. "You can't slide it in the dark, can you?"

"I couldn't stop, anyhow," Peanut replied. "You go so fast you can't stop till you're three or four hundred yards down the road—and I can't see the road. I'll have to side-step down."

"Can you do it?"

"I can try," the boy answered. "I side-stepped up all right."

He lay down ■ his side, with his skis parallel to

the steep face of the drift, and lowered his feet over, letting one ski rest into the snow, and sinking it hard. Then he gradually brought his weight on it, and when it held let the other foot slide down two feet more, and got a grip with that. He held his lantern in one hand, his poles in the other.

"It's going to hold, I guess," he said. "I'll wave my lantern when I'm ready."

Carefully and slowly he worked his way down to the bottom, and gave the signal.

"Coming," called the men on the top. He could barely see them, outlined against the night sky above him, with the keeper's lantern shining like a star on the crest of the snow-drift. Then he saw something dark coming slowly down along the white face of the snow wall. Presently it reached his feet, and he signaled to stop lowering. He untied the rope, the men hauled it up, and lowered the sled with the doctors' baggage. Then Peanut got both sleds faced down the hill, the rope refastened to the larger one, and sat down on his skis to wait while the men above made the long detour on their snow-shoes.

The east was reddening when they appeared, for the doctors and most of the East Bentford men were unused to snow-shoes and found it very hard to climb down around the rocks and through the tangle of trees and bushes.

As the procession started again, Peanut himself found it hard not to slide and get far ahead, for below the gorge the hill was much steeper, and as the trail had been packed it was slippery. He had to stem most of the time to hold himself back.

As they came out into a clearing, they found daylight, and the keeper stopped and blew out his lantern. It was dim in the woods again, but by the next clearing day had come, and Peanut looked back and saw the little procession strung out behind him on the snowy trail, the two doctors bringing up the rear, almost fagged but sticking grimly to their job.

He turned and went back. "Let me pull your sled," he said.

That's how it happened that Peanut was at the rear, pulling a load of baggage, when five reporters from East Bentford suddenly appeared around a bend, coming up clumsily on snow-shoes. They stopped astonished when they saw the procession.

"We didn't know you were coming down in the night!" they exclaimed.

"Well, we did," said the gamekeeper, laconically, not pausing in his stride.

The reporters came to Peanut and pumped him for facts about the trip, and he told them the bare facts of it. But he did not tell them of the solemn effect of that little procession winding down through

the black forest, with the bobbing lanterns in the lead, while the wind moaned in the pines; nor did he tell them how the coffin was lowered down over the great drift, while he at the bottom could see the men above outlined against the night sky and the keeper's lantern like a star on the snow. That was his story. He saw a chance for some descriptive writing like the work of Stevenson he had been studying.

As soon as the procession had reached East Bentford, Peanut turned over the rest of the story to Sumner, to follow the sleigh which bore the body to the railroad and see it put aboard the special train. He himself jumped the first trolley to Hampton.

When he entered the *Herald* office at nine o'clock everybody rushed at him, slapped him on the back, shook his hands, till he was red with embarrassment. Even J. S. came out and said, "That's a good job, Peanut!"

"But it's not done yet," the reporter protested. "I've got to do the story of bringing down the body."

"Well, get busy, then," said J. S. glancing at the clock. "Leave him alone, boys. The paper has to come out just the same, you know."

Peanut peeled off his outer clothes, and then his coat and vest. He had on two sets of wool underwear, remember. Presently he stopped writing, and the others saw him pull off his boots and take off

two pairs of socks. He threw them in a heap, and began writing again, in his stocking feet.

This, he felt, was his chance to do some real writing—not only to tell the facts, but to describe a scene so the reader would see it, too—to be an artist as well as a reporter. He wrote nearly a page, read it over, decided it was too flowery, tore it up, and began again. How the time was going! It was ten o'clock already, and the story hardly begun!

But suddenly he got hold of an opening sentence that pleased him. He began with the gamekeeper shaking the sleepers, who woke and crawled out from under their bearskins. Then four men and the doctors went up the stairs, and came down with the pine box. Then there was the poor old servant at the door, too old to make the trip, weeping because he could not go on this last journey with his master. And then the slow, solemn procession through the dark pines, the moan of the wind, the howl of the wildcat, the lowering of the load over the drift.

Suddenly the story was done! Peanut was surprised at how short a time it had taken him, after all. He looked at the clock. It was twelve! He had been at work three hours!

He took it to J. S. "This is a beat, too," he said. "I was the only reporter there."

"Good," said J. S. "The Hampton *Herald* in on the map of the United States these days!"

He glanced at the story, nodding his head, and handed it over to the copy desk. "Front page," he said.

Then he turned to Peanut. "Tired?" he asked.

Peanut suddenly realized that he was tired, and deadly sleepy.

"Haven't had my clothes off for two days," he laughed. "I am, sorter."

"Judd—come here," called J. S. "Take Peanut over to the hotel and give him a square meal—all he can eat. Then take him home and put him to bed. That's your assignment. Hang it up on your expense account."

"Thank you, sir," said Peanut.

"You're welcome," said J. S. "Beat it, both of you."

Peanut put on his boots, over a single pair of socks, his feet wabbling about in them, and he and Bill went over to the hotel where he consumed oysters, soup, a steak, potatoes, salad, ice-cream, and two cups of coffee. Bill ate his share, while he by turns stared and laughed as this great quantity of food disappeared inside the hungry Peanut.

"Didn't you have *anything* to eat for two days?" asked Bill.

"Sure—plenty," said the other. "But we had breakfast at four o'clock this morning, and I guess

I've used up a lot o' tissue these last two days. Say, I've done some regular work!"

"You have," said Bill, with honest admiration. "I only hope it hasn't strained you."

"Strained your grandmother," Peanut replied. "I'll tell you one thing, though," he went on, becoming very sober, "it's made me feel a lot older. I don't mean the work, but seeing that great man die, and the funeral down the mountain and all. I —I can't explain it, somehow, but I feel as if I'd grown about ten years."

"Death always makes you feel that way, I guess," Bill answered. "I wish, though, I could have been with you. You've seen Mayor Strong's face, anyhow. I never saw it."

The two young reporters fell silent, both thinking of the great man they had so admired.

Then Bill took Peanut home, waited till he'd had a hot bath, tucked him into bed with a laugh, pulled down the shades to keep out the daylight, and left him.

Peanut slept from two o'clock in the afternoon till six-thirty the next morning; and woke up in exactly the same position he had gone to sleep in.

CHAPTER XIII

PEANUT EARNS HIS CHANCE TO GO TO NEW YORK.

HE woke up on a Saturday, and the first thing he did was to rummage around down-stairs before breakfast for a copy of Friday's *Herald*, with his story. There it was, practically unchanged, and he read it as if it were the work of another man, and decided it was pretty good descriptive writing.

Then he grinned at his own thought. "Say, Peanut, you've not got a good opinion of yourself, have you?" he half whispered. "Come on now—it's probably rotten!"

But when he got to the office, the other men didn't say so. They were all telling him how good it was, when J. S. came through and overheard.

"Cut it out, boys!" he said. "Don't try to give Peanut a swelled head. Anybody ought to have written a good story with the material he had. If he couldn't, I'd fire him."

Peanut flushed, but down deep he realized that J. S. was trying to keep him from being too satisfied with himself, and he grit his teeth and said in his

heart that he'd forget that story, and try to make the next one better still.

J. S. didn't give him any assignment till nearly noon. Then he sent him out to write a weather story, for it had turned warm suddenly, and the snow was beginning to melt in the streets, making the going a mass of slush. Such are the ups and downs of a reporter's life.

On Sunday Peanut slept late, for he was still stiff and sore. When he got up, he went to the corner news stand before breakfast and got the New York papers, among them the *Sunday Transcript*, for the *Transcript* had a daily morning and Sunday edition as well as being a week-day afternoon paper. In fact, the morning paper was really the important one. There was a lot of news about Mayor Strong's funeral in New York which was to take place that day, with a long list of all the different societies which would attend, and the crowds which had viewed his body as it lay in state in the City Hall. He read every word of this, and then, turning into the feature section of the paper, he suddenly gasped, and rubbed his eyes, unable to believe at first what he saw.

There, clipped word for word from the Friday *Herald*, was his own story of the procession down the mountain. There was a paragraph of introduction, telling briefly how a "country reporter" on

skis, the same one who first brought out the news of the Mayor's death, came down with the body, and wrote this description. It didn't call him by name, but it certainly patted him on the back.

And that wasn't all. When he got to the office Monday morning, he found a check from the *Evening Transcript* for ■ hundred dollars, enclosed in ■ letter from the editor thanking him for his tip which had saved the *Transcript* from being beaten on the death news.

One hundred dollars! Peanut almost dropped the piece of precious paper from his fingers, they trembled so with excitement. He went over to Bill and showed it to him.

"Good work!" Bill cried. "That's great!"

"Half of it goes to you for sending the story for me," said Peanut.

"Go chase yourself!" Bill replied. "What do you take me for? All I did was to hand the story to ■ telegrapher. You did all the work, and you keep all the glory—and all the cash."

"No," said Peanut.

"Yes!" said Bill—and wouldn't listen to another word.

Later he came to Peanut and said, "Look here, you want to get to New York. Now's your chance, if ever. Why don't you write to the *Transcript*, thanking them for the check, and asking for ■ job?"

"Oh," Peanut gasped. "Do you think I dast?"

"You dared take a snow precipice at full speed."

"But this is different," Peanut laughed. "By gracious, I'll try, though! They can't more'n turn me down."

"They won't turn you down, I'm afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes—'cause I'd hate to lose you, old top," said Bill, laying his hand affectionately on Peanut's shoulder.

Peanut said nothing to anybody else, not even to J. S. But after hours, he stayed behind and wrote his letter to the managing editor of the *Evening Transcript*. He read it over carefully, and dropped it in a mail box. Then he waited, on pins and needles, for the answer.

It came after two days. The editor said that he could not offer anything definite, but the *Transcript* was interested in his work, especially his story reprinted in their Sunday paper, and he would be glad to have an interview with him.

Peanut showed this letter to Bill Judd. "What shall I do?" he asked.

"Well, you've got your hundred dollars. That'll take you to New York and then some. Tell J. S. just how the case stands, and get a leave of absence for two days."

Peanut went into J. S.'s office feeling curiously

guilty. Somehow it didn't seem square to the *Herald* to ask for two days off in order to try to get a job on another paper. But J. S. was very pleasant about it.

"Certainly," he said. "I'd hate to lose you, but I wouldn't stand in the way of your getting to New York if you want to try it. Go along, and good luck to you."

"Thank you, sir," Peanut replied. "You're the best editor I'll ever get, I guess!"

"Nonsense!" said J. S. sharply, as if he were cross about it.

The next morning Peanut took the train for New York. He had been in that great city but once in his life, when he and Art and some of the other Scouts several years before went through it with Mr. Rogers, their Scout Master, on their way to the Dismal Swamp. When he got out of the train at noon at the Grand Central Station and stepped into the vast concourse, full of people, he felt very small indeed, and rather more like turning around and taking the same train home than trying to tackle ~~an~~ unknown editor for a job.

But he didn't turn back. He went to the station restaurant for some lunch, and then took the subway down-town, getting off at the Brooklyn Bridge station. He asked a policeman where the *Transcript* office was, and three minutes later he was giving his

card to a haughty office boy, who seemed to regard Peanut ~~as~~ rather less important than a fly on the wall.

He waited a long time in a little anteroom, without even a glimpse into the offices of the paper, and then the boy came back and said, "This way."

Peanut followed, through the city room (as the big room is called where the reporters and the city editor have their desks), to a corridor beyond where a dozen different small offices were situated in a row, labeled Managing Editor, Sunday Editor, Managing Editor *Evening Transcript*, and so on.

It was at the door of the *Evening Transcript* managing editor that they stopped, while the boy tapped, and then led Peanut in. The first person he saw was the *Transcript* reporter who had been at East Bentford. He got up, shook Peanut's hand, and turned toward a man at a roll-top desk.

"This is the chap," he said. "Morrison—that's your name, isn't it?—Mr. Burton."

"How are you?" said Mr. Burton, the editor, turning a kindly face upon the young reporter and looking at him sharply through big, shell-rimmed spectacles. "Sit down. I'll see you in just a minute. That's all, Ropes—thanks."

The other reporter went out, and Peanut sat in a chair, his hat in his hand, his little bag beside him, and waited, trembling with excitement.

The managing editor was running over ~~some~~ proof with great rapidity. Presently he pushed a button, gave the sheets to a boy who entered, and turned to Peanut.

"Now," he said, "why did you send us that story of Strong's death? Of course, we're much obliged."

"Why—why—" Peanut stammered. "I knew the A. P. would get it from our extra edition in time for all the late New York afternoons, and I knew you didn't have A. P. service, so I—I thought ——"

"You thought it was a good chance to get in square with us?" the man laughed.

Peanut colored. "That was partly it," he said frankly. "And partly I thought it was mean for the A. P. papers to have it, and you not to have it; honestly, I did."

The man laughed again. "I believe you," he said. "But the first reason's no disgrace, my son. You're young, aren't you? How old?"

"I was twenty last summer, sir."

"Twenty, hm. Haven't been to college, eh? How'd you learn to write that story of the funeral down the mountain?"

"Well, I've been studying descriptive writers—Stevenson and Kipling and Richard Harding Davis, and men like that. I—I just tried in that story to tell just what I saw and felt, sir."

"You're pretty young for us," the editor said,

while Peanut's heart sank, "and skis aren't much use to a reporter in New York City, though they seem to be necessary up your way. But we like a chap who studies to improve himself, and we like one who can write what he sees so he can make other folks see it. Now, we've no place open on the *Evening Transcript*, but I'm going to take you in to the morning paper, and see what they have."

Peanut's hope rose again, ■■ he followed the editor into the next office, where ■ large, stout man with a pink face and ■ silver-gray moustache sat at a very neat desk.

"This is Mr. Howard, Morrison," said the evening editor. "Howard, here's that Hampton ski jumper I told you wrote to me for ■ job. He thinks he'd like to have a fling at the metropolis."

Mr. Howard wheeled slowly in his chair and looked at Peanut with eyes that seemed to bore right through him, and yet they were very kind eyes, and the man's voice, when he spoke, ■■ very soft and quiet and kindly.

"You wrote that story about the trip down the mountain with the body?" he asked.

Peanut nodded. "Yes, sir."

"I thought you'd be older. Are you willing to work hard, and take what comes, and learn **our** way of doing things?"

"Yes, sir."

"You understand that the *Transcript* takes men on trial? If we find they can't write our way, we have to drop 'em off the ship, gently but firmly. Our standards are pretty high, and we like humor. Have you got a sense of humor?"

Both men were looking at him, and Peanut thought he saw a twinkle in their eyes, as if they were trying to set a trap for him.

"My grandmother was Irish," Peanut replied.

Mr. Howard laughed. So did Burton.

"Well," said the older man, slowly, "we might try you out on the morning paper. But it's with the distinct understanding that we aren't guaranteeing you a place for any length of time, except we'll give you a two weeks' notice. How long you stay depends on how well you fit into our shop. We start everybody at fifteen dollars a week. Is that satisfactory?"

Peanut, gulping hard for joy, said, "Yes, sir, quite. When shall I come? I ought to give my paper a two weeks' notice, I guess."

"That's all right. Suppose you start with the New Year. We'll expect you, then, on January first, at one o'clock."

He turned away, and Peanut, murmuring a grateful, "Thank you," followed Burton back, and picked up his bag and hat.

"You're a stranger in New York, I suppose,"

Burton said, kindly. "Where are you staying the night?"

"I—I'm not staying," said Peanut. "I'm going to catch the 3:30 train home!"

CHAPTER XIV

“BUCKING THE METROPOLIS WITH A FOUNTAIN PEN”

HE took the subway up-town, without seeing more of New York than City Hall Park, and emerged into the Grand Central Station just in time for his train.

At half-past eight he was once more in Hampton, and rushed to a 'phone to call up Bill Judd's house and tell him the news. Then he called up his own house in Southmead, and had a ten minute talk with his mother. After that he went shopping, for Christmas was close at hand. He still had ninety dollars of his hundred dollar check, and he resolved to give his little brother and sister, and his parents, just the Christmas presents they wanted most. He felt so good that evening that he would have gladly bought presents for everybody he knew.

Peanut spent Christmas day at home. He called on Mr. Rogers, his old Scout Master, in the afternoon, and had a long talk with him. Mr. Rogers still spent a good deal of time in New York, where he had once lived, for he was an illustrator by pro-

fession, and had to go there on business. He gave Peanut valuable advice about places to live, and also several letters of introduction.

"Course I'll go up to the Boy Scout National Headquarters," Peanut declared, "and ~~see~~ how I can help."

"You're going to be on a morning paper now, and I'm afraid you won't have much time for scouting," Mr. Rogers said. "You'll work every afternoon and evening, except your day off. But don't forget you're a good Scout, of course. Maybe I'll go down with you on December 30th, and ~~see~~ if I can't help you get settled. How'd you like that?"

"Say—would I like it!" Peanut exclaimed. "Gosh, I don't know why folks are so good to me!"

"If they are, I suppose it's because you are good-natured, and try to help other people," Mr. Rogers laughed. "Folks don't break their necks to be good to a grouch, I've noticed."

Peanut's last week on the *Herald* was a busy one, and a sad one—busy because two men were sick, and he worked like a Trojan, and sad because when the time for leaving came he hated to go, to separate from Bill Judd and Sumner and the other men with whom he had toiled side by side for almost a year, to give up his battered old desk in the

dingy office, and to work for somebody else than "old J. S."

Bill Judd and the rest hated to see him go, too.

"We'll miss your alleged jokes, Peanut," Sumner said.

"We'll miss his grin and his freckles," said Bill, putting an arm around Peanut's shoulder.

"We'll miss his skis in the next blizzard," said J. S. "Bill, you've got to learn how to ski, that's all there is to it!"

But the time for parting came. On the 29th of December Peanut took the late afternoon trolley to Southmead, to say good-bye to his family and a lot of his old Scouts, including little Jimmy Gerson, who came up to his house that evening, and came again to the station to see him off. Mr. Rogers went with him to New York the next morning. At noon they arrived once more at the Grand Central Station, and this time stepped out into 42d Street instead of down into the subway. Peanut looked at the great roll of traffic—cabs, motors, street-cars, drays, express wagons; he looked up at the towering hotels, at the elevated railroad, at the office buildings; and he grinned.

"I'm bucking this," he said, "armed with one small fountain pen the Wildcats gave me! Looks like some job!"

"Some job is right," said Mr. Rogers. "But

■ long as you keep that grin on your face, you'll be all right. Now, we'll find you a place to live."

"I'm going to make fifteen dollars a week—we might try the Waldorf-Astoria!" said Peanut, grinning again.

CHAPTER XV

THE NEW REPORTER IS TRIED OUT IN NEW YORK

THEY passed by the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on their way down Fifth Avenue and continued in the 'bus till it came to a stop in Washington Square. Then they walked to an old red building, six stories high, at the east of the Square, called The Benedick, which was one of the first bachelor apartment houses built in New York.

"I used to live here," said Mr. Rogers. "And I know several men who still live here. You can't afford a front room on fifteen a week, but maybe you can get one of the small back rooms."

They did find one vacant, for twenty-two dollars a month. It was, however, unfurnished, ■ all the rooms in the building were.

"That doesn't matter," Mr. Rogers said. "A bed and a bureau and a chair and a table won't cost much, and I know you'll be happier here than anywhere, because I'm going to introduce you later to some of the other men in the building. It's a lot to pay for rent—five-fifty out of every week's pay—and doesn't leave you much leeway. You'll have to cut

out fancy dinners at Delmonico's for a while. But you'll probably be making a bit extra soon with Sunday articles, and it is far better in New York to come home to a clean, comfortable room at night than it is to try to skimp. What you'd better do as soon as possible is to get hold of some other nice young chap on your paper, and bring him here for a roommate. You could get a room a little bit larger, probably, for thirty dollars, and that would mean only fifteen a month apiece."

They went to a furniture store next, and Peanut invested some of his savings in a single iron bed, a bureau, a small mirror, a chair and a table. Then they bought some bedding and towels.

"Now you're fixed," said Mr. Rogers. "Let's go to dinner and a play. You can spend to-night with me at my hotel."

They had a jolly time that evening, and Peanut felt more as if he were off on a holiday than as if he were about to begin work at the bottom of the ladder in New York. He spent the next morning straightening out his new furniture in his room on Washington Square, putting up on the mantelpiece some photographs of his mother and little sister and Bill Judd and his Wildcat Patrol on their skis, and getting his trunk unpacked and his clothes hung up in the closet. At noon he went out and got some lunch, and then took the subway down-town. He

was at the *Transcript* office at quarter of one, and reported to Mr. Howard.

That quiet, pleasant-faced man looked at him keenly for a moment, as though he had forgotten him. "Oh, yes," he said. "Sure enough—Morrison, the ski runner. You were to report to-day. Well, you go out in the city room and wait till the afternoon assignments are out of the way. Then you and I'll have a talk with the city editor."

Peanut went back into the big city room, which was now filling up with reporters. This was the city room for the *Morning Transcript*, and the reporters didn't report till one o'clock. The evening paper was edited in a separate room. Peanut looked about for the reporter who had been at East Bentford—Ropes was his name, he had learned from Sumner. Ropes came in presently, and saw the stranger.

"Hello, Morrison," he said, heartily, putting out his hand. "So you're with us now."

"Yes, I'm going to have a try at it. Don't know how long I'll last here, though."

"Oh, the big berg isn't so very different from the one cylinder town, when you get the hang of it," Ropes replied. "Keep your eyes open, that's all. And remember the *Transcript* likes bright, snappy stuff. Here, Tom, let me introduce you to Morrison, the kid that beat us all on the Strong story."

He's come down to us now. Morrison, this is Tom Knight. You wouldn't have got your beat if he'd been at East Bentford, because he was a ski jumper at Dartmouth."

Peanut found himself shaking hands with a young man not more than three or four years older than he was, a tall, good-looking young man with the same clean-cut face and nice manners Peanut associated with Bill Judd and Rob Evarts back at Hampton and Southmead. He would have picked Tom Knight out for a young college graduate if Ropes hadn't said that he went to Dartmouth. And, when Knight grasped his hand, he knew that he was strong and athletic, for though Peanut himself was far from a weakling, Knight's grip actually hurt his fingers.

Peanut liked him. "You ski?" he asked, to make conversation.

"Used to a lot at Hanover. Snow-shoes, too. We went up Mount Washington on snow-shoes in Christmas vacation."

"Wow!" cried Peanut. "Wish I'd been there! How'd you go up?"

"The carriage road. Do you know the mountain?"

"I've been up the Crawford Trail, and the Tucker-man head wall," Peanut answered, "and part way up the Huntington head wall. But it was in summer,

though—or it was part of the time. We got caught for several hours in a snow-storm on the Crawford Trail, and had to ride it out in the shelter hut between Monroe and the summit cone."

"Is that so?" cried Knight. "Say, you do know the old mountain! I'd just like to be there now! Think of the drift in Tuckerman's!"

"You chaps are getting out of my province," Ropes laughed. "I've had all the snow I want for one winter, thank you!"

He moved away, leaving Peanut and his new friend talking.

A moment later the assistant city editor brought the afternoon assignment book to the table where the reporters consulted it, and Knight had to go to find out what his work was.

"I'll see you later," he said. "My day off is Monday. If they ask you what day you want off, tell 'em Monday, too. Then maybe we can get some ski trips in up in Westchester."

"You bet," said Peanut.

Knight came back with his assignment. "I've got to go way up to Harlem," he said. "Stick around here about six o'clock, and we'll go out somewhere and eat together. What do you say?"

"Sure," said Peanut.

He felt a warm glow of pleasure that Knight seemed to like him. Knight was so much like Bill

Judd, though more athletic and lively, that it made him feel less homesick, too. He sat down, and began to read the morning *Transcript* carefully. One by one all the reporters went out, and only the city editor, his assistant, and two or three inside men were left in the big room. Presently Mr. Howard appeared, went over to the city editor's desk, and a moment later called Peanut.

"This is Mr. Nichols," he said, "from whom you'll take your orders for the present."

"How do you do?" said the city editor, a smooth-faced, brisk man of about forty, who had a briar pipe between his teeth. "What kind of work have you done in Hampton?"

"About everything," said Peanut. "'Course, the *Herald* was a little paper, with a small staff, and we all had to cover anything from a city election to a baseball game."

"You will find that the *Transcript* doesn't specialize so much as some other city papers," Mr. Nichols said. "We expect our men to be able to cover either a city election or a baseball game, too. Are you fond of baseball?"

Peanut grinned. "Sure," he said. "Used to hold down number one sack."

The city editor didn't seem greatly impressed. "The first thing I want you to do," he continued, "is to realize that the *Transcript* office is a little like

a club. All our men are agreeable, polite and neat in personal appearance. We never want it said that a *Transcript* reporter isn't a gentleman, wherever he goes. The second thing I want you to realize is that when we give a man an assignment we never tell him how much to write, or how to write it. We expect him to judge for himself how much news value it has, and to know the proper way to handle it. If he can't learn that, we don't keep him. You've read the *Transcript*, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir, every day!" said Peanut. "We all read it in the *Herald* office."

"Well, don't stop now. You are expected to know what's in the paper every day, before you report for duty. Now, I'm going to try you on an assignment. Did you see a story we had this morning about trouble with Venezuela?"

"Yes, sir; you mean about the treaty?"

"Yes. Go down and ask ex-Secretary of State Olcott what he thinks about the rights of it. He made a lot of those treaties, you know."

Peanut looked up ex-Secretary Olcott's address, put on his hat and coat and went out. He was on his first assignment for a big New York newspaper—and it was an assignment to interview a former Secretary of State, now a famous lawyer, about a treaty which concerned the whole United States government! The ex-Secretary's office was down

near Wall Street and Peanut almost ran down the slit of Nassau Street, keeping in the road to avoid the slow-moving crowds on the narrow sidewalks. He entered the revolving doors of the skyscraper, looked on the name board to find the number of Mr. Olcott's office, got into an elevator, and was shot up fifteen stories. He entered the law offices of Olcott and Peters with trembling knees, but managed to give his name and business to the office boy in a firm voice.

The boy came back almost immediately and ushered him into Mr. Olcott's private office. Peanut saw a small, gray man sitting at a flat top desk. He had a quick, nervous manner, and a very firm jaw.

"Well?" he snapped.

Peanut had been accustomed in Hampton to be treated with good nature by nearly everybody, for in a small city people have more time to be good-natured, and, besides, the newspaper in a small town is regarded as more or less of a family institution so that the reporters are known to everybody. Therefore he was somewhat taken aback by Olcott's manner.

"The—I—the *Transcript* sent me to see if you wouldn't make some comment on the treaty troubles with Venezuela," he said, stammering a little.

"Nothing to say," Olcott snapped, turning again to the papers on his desk.

Peanut fidgeted with his hat. "But the treaties are familiar to you," he urged, "and the *Transcript* would like a word."

The man turned on him quickly, his jaw set.

"I have nothing to say!" he repeated.

Peanut was nonplussed and bitterly disappointed. He saw himself failing on his first assignment. So he rallied his courage, and began again. "The question is one that you ——"

Olcott wheeled sharply in his chair, and gave Peanut a look which seemed to bore him through. "I said I had nothing to say!" he repeated, in a tone that made the reporter realize it wouldn't be safe to ask again. He went quickly and silently out of the door.

As he got into the elevator to descend to the street, he noticed casually that it was the same car he had come up in. With slow steps now, for he was baffled and worried, he went back up Nassau Street.

As he was entering the *Transcript* Building he met Ropes, who had just come across from City Hall.

"Assignment already?" Ropes asked.

Peanut told him what it was, and the result. His face must have been very long and glum, for Ropes looked at him in a kindly way, and then laughed.

"Say, kid, you did me a good turn in your country. I'll try to reciprocate," he said. "Olcott never gives interviews. He's never been known to. He always sees the reporter, and turns him down. It's a regular newspaper joke. Nichols just sicked you on him to find out how you'd handle it. It's up to you to make a stickful of copy out of it that'll get by into the paper. Just ordinary stuff they'll throw away."

Peanut thanked the older man, and went to the desk which had been assigned to him. He had lost his sense of disappointment and chagrin now, and his fighting blood was up. He ran his fingers through his sandy hair, thought a few moments, grinned, and wrote the following story:

"A *Transcript* reporter took the express elevator to the fifteenth story of the Bankers' Trust Building this afternoon to ask former Secretary of State Robert S. Olcott if he had any comment to make regarding the treaty dispute between this government and Venezuela. Mr. Olcott, during his term as Secretary, had much to do with the drafting of the now disputed treaties. The former Secretary replied, 'I have nothing to say,' and the *Transcript* man caught the same elevator going down."

He read this over carefully, and cut out "The former Secretary replied, 'I have nothing to say,'" making it read simply, "The *Transcript* man caught

the same elevator going down." Then he took his single sheet of copy to Mr. Nichols.

"Thanks," said the city editor, not even glancing at it, as he tossed the paper into a pile on his desk.

Peanut walked away, a trifle chagrined, and sat down at his desk. He had nothing to do now, and felt very lonely and insignificant. Ropes was busy writing. His other friend, Knight, had not come in. He picked up the morning *Transcript* again, and worked out the proper number of letters for the different style of head-lines, to keep himself occupied.

Knight returned at half-past four, and fell at once to work on his story. Other men came in and began to write up their afternoon assignments. The evening assignment book was put out, and Peanut, looking at it with the rest, saw his name down, and opposite it the words, "On call."

"What does that mean?" he asked Knight.

"Means you get back at seven, and stick around till the second edition has gone to bed," said Knight. "Nasty job, answering telephones and cooling your heels. They always soak it off on cubs. Come on to grub some place, and we'll talk skis."

The two young men went out to a low-priced restaurant, and Peanut told his new friend about his interview with ex-Secretary Olcott. Knight laughed. "You'll see in the morning whether you got by with it. Look out somebody doesn't leave a note in your

box telling you to call up 6340 Rector, and ask for Mr. Fish."

"What's the joker in that?"

"6340 Rector is the Aquarium," said Knight.

Peanut spent that evening on call in the office, but he didn't cool his heels much till after twelve o'clock. Ordinarily there would have been another man on call, also, but the night editor sent him out on a late assignment, and Peanut, left alone, was kept busy taking down stories over the telephone, from the various reporters stationed through the city at the most prominent police stations, the night courts, and so on. The night editor, a man they all called "Boss Clarkin," sat at the city editor's desk, and in front of him, at two long tables, sat a dozen copy readers and cable and telegraph editors, who edited all copy and put the heads on, after Boss Clarkin had looked at it.

Boss Clarkin himself was a man with gray hair and a gray moustache, who spoke very little, and in a low, even voice. He looked extremely grouchy, and ordered Peanut to do this or that as if the new cub had been a piece of machinery. But, when the hands of the clock reached 12:15, and the first edition was "closed up" (that is, no more copy could be taken for that edition), so that everybody had a breathing space of an hour with only a few loose ends to clean up for the second, or city edition,

Boss Clarkin strolled over from his corner to Peanut's desk.

"You come from Hampton, Morrison?" he asked.

"No, sir, Southmead. I worked in Hampton a year."

"Southmead, eh? How's old Baldface Mountain?"

"Oh, do you know that country?"

"I was born on a farm five miles over on the other side of Baldface," Boss Clarkin replied. "Pretty good land, the old New England hills—if you don't have to make a living there! Think you're going to like it in New York?"

"Yes, sir. I like newspaper work."

"Enjoy interviewing Olcott?" Boss Clarkin grinned.

"I didn't have time," said Peanut.

The night editor laughed and went back to his desk, but Peanut felt somehow more at home. He felt as if this seemingly grouchy, silent man was going to be his friend, and he realized, too, why it was that the reporters spoke of him as "Boss Clarkin" with a sort of affection in their tone. He was a lot like "old J. S." back on the *Herald*—keen, sharp, probably sarcastic, but at bottom kind and fond of his reporters.

"I guess newspaper men are something alike, everywhere," Peanut thought to himself.

He was almost asleep at his desk when the word came at 1:15 that he could go home. He wasn't used to working at night. He got into his new bed and slept till ten o'clock, and then hurried out for breakfast, and a morning *Transcript*.

His story was in the paper! It followed the Washington despatch about the treaty dispute, and was headed:—

"Olcott Says Nothing in Record Time."

When he got to the office, Ropes nodded to him.

"Well, you got by with it, kid," he said.

"Thanks to you," Peanut replied, turning red with pleasure.

But Nichols, the city editor, said nothing whatever about the little story. He didn't have Peanut down for any afternoon assignment, and after the other reporters had all departed, he called Peanut to his desk.

"Morrison," he said, "do you know what a human interest story is?"

"N-no, sir, I'm afraid I don't."

"Well, you must find out. The *Transcript* likes human interest stories. They are little stories without any particular news value, in the ordinary sense, but which people like to read because they strike a note of human interest. If the City Hall gets on fire, that's a straight news story. If a small boy

gets lost and wanders in and goes to sleep in the Mayor's chair, that's a human interest story. Go take a turn around town and see if you can find us a human interest yarn."

"Yes, sir," said Peanut.

But when he reached his desk, for his hat and coat, he drew in his breath.

"Whew!" he said. "What ~~am~~ I up against?"

CHAPTER XVI

A "HUMAN INTEREST STORY"

HE crossed the street and stood in City Hall Park. Here he was, in the midst of the biggest city in America, the second biggest city in the world, with the Woolworth Tower rising over seven hundred feet into the air on one side of him, and below him the great forest of skyscrapers, any two of the largest housing enough people to equal the entire population of Hampton!

"There ought to be some kind of a human interest story happening every minute in such a place," thought Peanut.

He went over to Broadway and walked slowly down-town, keeping his eyes and ears open. But people were hurrying quietly along the sidewalks, the cars and motors were running regularly in the street, nothing at all unusual seemed to be happening. At Trinity Church he turned down Wall Street, but nothing unusual was happening there. He kept on to the water-front, still without a sign of a story. Then he walked south along the water-front still without coming on any trace of a story.

Finally he found himself at the Battery, the little green park on the very southern nose of Manhattan Island. The great skyscrapers were piled up like a mountain range behind him. To left and right were the East and Hudson Rivers, meeting in front of him to make the Upper Bay. Ferry-boats were coming and going to Staten Island. A big ocean liner was passing toward her docks. Off to the southeast, on a little island, he could see the Statue of Liberty. But all about him in the park people were going quietly about their business, and nothing was happening.

Peanut was discouraged. He sat down on a bench for a moment, then got up, grit his teeth, and started north, up the west side of the city this time, along the water-front. He had gone only a few steps when he saw the entrance to a pier standing open, and he went through and walked out to the end of the pier. He didn't expect to find any story, but he would get a fresher whiff of the salt water smell before he continued his search.

There was nobody out on the pier head, and Peanut sat down on the edge, with his feet hanging over, and looked across the Hudson River sparkling and dancing in the cold winter sunlight. The first thing that attracted his attention was the gulls. They were darting and swooping everywhere, with graceful turns and dips. Against the sun, they

seemed almost black ; then they would turn and the sun would strike on their wings and back, so that they flashed white. They beat against the wind with hard strokes and sailed with it like aeroplanes, on motionless wings. And always they watched the water, darting down when they saw food and snatching it. Presently Peanut saw one, close to his feet, snatch up a bit of sardine from an open tin which had evidently been tossed into the water, had struck just right, and floated along instead of sinking. He realized that probably most of the gulls were feeding on stuff that had been thrown into the river, not ~~on~~ live fish. They were living on crumbs from the city's table, as it were.

That made him look closer at the water near by. The tide was running out, and he soon discovered that all sorts of things were going past on the current. One of the first—and it made him grin—was a perfectly good derby hat, bobbing up and down on the waves.

"Some poor guy lost that off from a ferry-boat, I suppose," Peanut thought. "Had to get a new hat when he reached town."

After the derby came a whole procession of things, boxes, cans, pieces of wood, a woman's hat with the soaked, bedraggled feathers trailing like broken sails in the water, a nicely tied up package evidently lost off some ferry-boat, a doll floating

with face up, a dead pig, and half a hundred other things.

Peanut began to note them down on a piece of paper. After more than an hour of watching he had accumulated quite a list.

“Say!” he suddenly told himself, “if this interests me so much, why won’t it interest other people? Why isn’t it a human interest story?”

To be sure, he’d never seen such a story in a paper—but maybe that would please the *Transcript* all the better. He sprang up and hurried back to the office, where he worked steadily till after five, writing a tale about the things that go by on the tide. He wrote it in the style of the men who write about tracking animals in the snow. It was the new sport for city Boy Scouts, he said, to find out what had happened up-stream from the evidence which floated by the Battery. This seemed to him an amusing idea, and he had a lot of fun writing his story. He also put in some more serious description of the way gulls fly and fish.

But when it was finished he realized that it was a whole column long, too long for the daily paper. He took it over to Mr. Nichols.

“I’m afraid this is Sunday paper stuff, if it fits anywhere,” he said. “I—I’m too green in New York to know where to go for stories on my own hook yet.”

Nichols barely glanced at him, as he took the copy. "I'll have a look at it," he answered. "On call again to-night, please."

The next day, which was Saturday, Nichols said nothing to him about his story, one way or the other, but he gave him an assignment—a small one, to be sure, but a real one. He had to go up-town to the meeting of a society and get the list of new officers and find out what other business was transacted. That evening he was again on call.

The first edition of the Sunday paper came up to the editorial room before he went home, and he grabbed a copy.

Lo, there was his story about the things that go by on the tide! Somebody had changed it a little here and there, to make it funnier, more of a josh ; but what he wrote about the sea-gulls wasn't altered at all, and the whole story had a good display in the magazine section. Peanut felt suddenly hot and prickly all over with pleasure. He had made good on his second test. And just at that moment he heard Boss Clarkin, who was skimming over the paper, ask a copy reader, "I wonder who wrote this yarn about the things floating by the Battery? It's not bad."

Peanut wanted to shout, "I did!"

But he kept silent, and answered the telephone instead. He knew that nobody respects a boaster.

CHAPTER XVII

PEANUT GIVES A BULLY A LITTLE SURPRISE PARTY

BUT none of the editors of the paper said a word to him directly in praise of the story, however. Peanut realized that on the *Transcript* you were expected to make good. You only heard from it if you didn't. All that was said to him was Mr. Nichols' remark on Monday. "You may charge that Sunday magazine article at space rates," he said. "Whenever you can pick up satisfactory stuff for the Sunday magazine pages, you are allowed \$7.50 a column for it. But you must not allow that to interfere in any way with your regular work."

That was why Peanut's pay envelope the first week contained \$22.50 instead of \$15.

On Monday, too, he began to receive regular assignments. They were little ones at first, and for some time he was kept "on call" in the evening. But they took him out into the city in the afternoon, and he soon began to find his way about the town, to get acquainted with the other men on the paper, and with many reporters from other papers.

But Tom Knight remained his best friend. The

two ate together almost every evening, and after Peanut had secured Monday as his day off and sent home for his skis, they went out to Westchester almost every week as long as the snow lasted, starting early in the morning and skiing till dark, cooking their noon meal somewhere in the woods. On Tuesdays they would report at the office freshened up by their outing, and they never could understand why other men on the paper didn't get out the same way to exercise.

After a month, too, Tom and Peanut were able to secure a cheap double apartment in the Benedick, and they became roommates. Tom contributed a lot more furniture, some of which had been in his room in college, a couple of big rugs, some sofa cushions and a number of pictures. He had a lot of books, too, which made Peanut's little library look, as Peanut said, "like a fly speck on the Woolworth Building." Their new quarters were very comfortable, so comfortable that after a few days they decided not to go out for breakfast any more, but to cook it themselves.

So they got a little alcohol stove, had milk delivered every morning, and with the fruit, eggs and bread they would purchase the day before, and the coffee and cereal they made in the room, they saved both time and money.

"I reckon I save fifteen cents a day, at least,"

said Peanut. "That's \$1.05 a week. Know what I'm going to do with it?"

"No," laughed Tom. "Buy a limousine?"

"I'm going to buy books," said Peanut. "I never went to college, like you and Boss Clarkin and Mr. Nichols, and so many *Transcript* men. But I'm going to get the books you've all read, and read 'em, too, on the subway and elevated road, and other places. Why, you waste at least an hour a day just riding 'round in this bloomin' town. That's six hours a week, at least, or half a day every fortnight. I could read a couple of books a month, just on the cars."

"You're in a statistical mood, seems to me," laughed Tom. "But why not get the books from a library?"

"It's not the same thing as owning 'em. I just want to *have* 'em, all my own."

"Go to it, Peanut," said Tom. "You've got the right idea. But no books on our days off!"

"No, sir! We get our exercise!" cried Peanut.

Gradually Peanut found himself working into police reporting as a phase of his training. All over New York are police stations, and certain of these stations are in parts of the city where stories are likely to "break." At such stations the newspapers keep men to watch the "blotter." The police "blotter" is a sort of bulletin-board on which

are posted brief records of the police activities, the arrests, raids, accidents, and so forth, as fast as they take place. The reporters consult this blotter frequently, and if something is posted there which looks like a good story, worth writing about, they follow it up, interview the police to get the facts, go to the scene of the crime or disturbance, and the like. Sometimes the police tip the reporters off in advance when something is going to happen which they know about, like a raid on a gambling house.

At first Peanut was rather lost on this new job. The New York policemen were not so friendly as the Hampton police—at least, not to a stranger. Then, too, from the bare records on the blotter he wasn't able to tell always what promised to be a good story, and he found that the reporters from the other papers were going to horse him a bit before they helped him much.

He didn't mind the horsing in the least. He was good natured and quick witted, and could give as good as he received. He didn't mind when they put up a practical joke or two on him, such as sending him to interview "John Doe" at a certain number which turned out to be a vacant lot. (John Doe, of course, as some of the readers of this book will know, and as Peanut ought to have known, is the regular name given by the police and the courts to somebody whose real name is unknown.)

But while Peanut didn't mind good-natured jokes, he hated meanness, and he took an especial dislike to a reporter named Sweeney, a man eight or ten years older than he, who drank and swore a great deal, and also played cards a lot. He tried several times to get Peanut to play, and sneered sarcastically when the younger man refused.

"Aren't we the good little country boy!" he'd say. Or else, "'Fraid mama 'll catch you, darling?'"

Peanut stood this patiently. Sweeney wasn't the kind of man he liked to josh back. But one evening Sweeney played him a dirty trick. The two of them were looking at the blotter, which contained news of a raid on a gambling house.

"Isn't that something we ought to look up?" said Peanut.

"Aw, it's happening all the time. The papers won't touch raids," said Sweeney. "Not in that part of town, anyhow. I'm going over to Broadway and see a show for a bit."

Now it happened that the raid was in a fashionable street, which Peanut didn't know, and Sweeney went out, tipped off the other reporters, and the next day all the papers had the story except the *Transcript*. Peanut was badly beaten, and he went down to the office with a sinking heart.

Nichols, the city editor, gave him a short, sharp, stinging call down.

Peanut didn't try to explain to him why he missed fire on the story. Nichols would only have told him that it was his business to judge for himself, not rely on Sweeney. He swallowed the call down with a lump in his heart. It was his first real failure.

But he had it in for Sweeney!

He told Tom Knight, his roommate, about it, before he went up-town, and Tom whistled.

"Sweeney, eh?" he said. "I worked with him a month at that same station. He's a big bully, and he's always trying to get cubs into card games and take their money. Hope you don't play with him."

"He's got a swell chance at my roll!" Peanut replied.

"Well, he's a mucker and a bully," said Tom. "By George, if I were you I believe I'd just punch his head if he gets at all fresh again, and tries to guy you. A punch is the only kind of repartee that would penetrate his skull, I guess. And a lot of other men would thank you if you did it."

"I don't want a scrap," Peanut remarked. "I hate to fight—honest, I do. And it's no way for grown men to act. But if he gets nasty again, I believe I'll take your advice, if I am a cub."

"Go to it," laughed Tom. "Let Sweeney know you've got his number, anyhow. Call him a mucker and a card sharp, if he calls you a molly-coddle—and see if he has the sand to resent it."

The police station was on a poor, mean, side street, and directly opposite to it was a row of little two story tumble-down brick houses, relic of an older day. One of these houses was rented by all the newspapers as a joint office for their reporters, so they could be close to the station and consult the blotter frequently. There were only four rooms in it, two up-stairs and two down. A negro janitor kept a fire going, but he didn't do much cleaning up. The rooms were full of desks, typewriters, telephones, and tobacco smoke. There were a dozen reporters who used the building, some of them till three o'clock for the afternoon papers, some from two or three o'clock on till midnight, for the morning papers. Peanut and Sweeney, of course, belonged to this latter group.

When Peanut came into the house this afternoon, after his call down from his city editor and his talk with Tom, Sweeney and two other men were sitting at a desk playing cards to while away the time. Playing cards was Sweeney's usual occupation when not at work, and he always played for money, which Peanut had been brought up to regard as wrong, and which he knew was a foolish waste. Sweeney looked up as Peanut came in.

“Hello, kid,” he said. “Anything of interest on the blotter?”

The other two men laughed.

"I'm waiting for you to decide for me," Peanut replied. "You're such a kindly soul."

"Hello, the kid's getting fresh!" said Sweeney, with a bit of a sneer.

Peanut made no reply, but went over to his desk, which was in the same room, and began to read one of the new books he had purchased.

"Say, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wouldn't you like to pause in the pursuit of the higher learning for a time, and indulge in a little worldly recreation?" Sweeney laughed presently. "We'll trust you for a stack of chips. Come on, kid, we won't give you the go by again."

"No, I don't believe you will," said Peanut. "And I'm just as much obliged, but I guess I won't play. You see, I'm the only support of a widowed mother and seven small brothers and sisters, and I don't think I could take you on, too, at my present salary."

"Look here," said Sweeney, laying down his cards. "What do you mean by that?"

Peanut was not in the least afraid of him, but he was trembling a little from excitement, which Sweeney saw, and evidently attributed to terror.

"I guess you know what I mean," the boy answered.

Sweeney pushed back his chair ■ if he were going at Peanut, and the other two men spoke up.

"Sit down, Sweeney, and leave the kid alone," they said. "Don't be starting anything in here."

"Who's starting anything? I'm not! He started it!" Sweeney shouted. "What do you mean, you?"

Peanut, who had pretended to read again, closed his book.

"I mean I was tipped off when I came up here that you'd try to get my money, if you must know," said he. "Being a cub, I haven't got any money, to be sure. But nobody tipped me off that you would do a fellow dirt, as you did me yesterday. I'm not whining, mind you. I'm just telling you that I'm not so green I don't know when I've been done dirty by, that's all. I'll take all the joshing anybody can give me, but I won't stand for a low down, mean trick and then pretend the next day I feel the same toward the man who played it on me. I got your number, Sweeney—that's all."

"Say, you'll take that back!" cried Sweeney, leaping up.

"No," Peanut answered. "I never take back what I mean."

"Oh, let him alone! Sit down and play cards!" the other two urged.

"No, he's too fresh," shouted Sweeney, with an oath, walking over toward Peanut, who stood up

quietly by his desk. "I'm going to put him out in the nice, cool air for a while."

He stood glaring close into Peanut's face. "Will you take that back?" he demanded.

"No," said Peanut, smiling into the angry eyes in front of him, "and I warn you now that if you touch me I'll give you the worst licking you ever had. You're a big, fresh bully, and it's just about coming to you."

"Is it?" snarled Sweeney, catching at Peanut by the collar, as if he were going to throw him out of the room.

The other two men had risen, as if to interfere, but they hesitated, and so did Markham, of the *World*, who had just come in the door, as if they really wanted to see what would happen.

They didn't have long to wait. As Sweeney's hand touched his collar, Peanut's eyes suddenly flashed and his jaws snapped together.

"Will you take your hand off?" he asked, in a deadly quiet tone.

For answer, Sweeney yanked him as if to drag him to the door. Sweeney was a man of thirty, heavier than Peanut, who looked slenderer than he was and didn't show his one hundred and fifty-four pounds. But Sweeney spent his time playing cards and drinking, when he wasn't reporting, and had been doing that for ten years. Peanut, on the other

hand, was in the condition of an athlete. And he knew a lot more tricks of boxing and wrestling than Sweeney did.

He suddenly ducked his head sharply, hit up with his left hand on Sweeney's wrist so hard that it broke the hold, and with his right caught the other man a vicious upper cut under the jaw which sent him spinning backward against a table.

Before Sweeney could spring forward again, the three other reporters caught and held him. He didn't seem over anxious to get away, either, after a minute of struggle.

"Say, the kid's got a punch for fair!" said Markham. "What's the row all about, anyhow?"

Another reporter explained.

"Well, it *was* a dirty trick we played him, for a fact," said Markham. "I didn't know the kid hadn't been tipped off last night, or I'd have given him the story myself. And as for the rest, Sweeney, you know you've been taking the cubs' money from 'em for years. Go ahead, though, put the kid out if you want to. Let him free, boys. Let's see the scrap."

"I don't think he wants to very much," said Peanut, the grin returning to his face. "But if he'll wait a minute, I'm going anyway, to see what's on the blotter. I'll come back and report if it's anything good."

"Hold on! not so fast!" cried Markham. "We

really can't have scraps like this going on here, making bad feeling. This has gone far enough. Come on now, Sweeney, you and Morrison shake hands, and then we'll all go out and have a drink together."

Peanut put out his hand, and Sweeney, reluctantly, with his left hand nursing his jaw, put out his.

"All right, kid, we'll forget it for now," he said, slowly.

"No, we'll forget it for good," said Peanut—"or else not at all."

"That's the talk!" cried the cheerful Markham.
"Now, for a drink!"

They all went up the street a block to a barroom, which Peanut entered reluctantly, for he had never drunk, and didn't like barrooms.

When it came his turn to order, he said, "A grape juice lemonade."

The barkeeper looked surprised and the other reporters laughed.

"Oh, come on, be a man!"

"Say, do you think you're William Jennings Bryan?"

"Give the child some milk, barkeep."

This last was from Sweeney.

"Milk is very good for the muscles," said Peanut quietly. "I advise you to try it."

Markham laughed loudly. "Now will you be

good, Sweeney?" he said. "Let the kid drink what he wants. Strikes me he's the kind that will, anyhow."

When they went out on the street again, Peanut and Markham left the others, and crossed toward the station house.

"Say, you gave that mucker what was coming to him," Markham said. "It was a mean trick we put over on you last night. You ought to have punched us all. But I guess the rest didn't really know what Sweeney had done."

"I didn't do it on that account," Peanut replied. "But I'm only a green kid, and he was trying to rope me into a card game, just as he's roped other cubs in. That's what made me want to punch him. I've been a Scout Master, and I know how hard it is to keep boys out of temptation. A man who tries to put 'em in bad certainly gets my goat. I don't mind his putting one over on me last night—it was up to me to know a good story for myself. And I don't want to make bad feeling in the house, either. I guess you came just in time!"

"You've not made any bad feeling," said Markham. "You've made some of us your friends. And don't you ever let 'em guy you into drinking whiskey, either, if you don't want to. There are too many newspaper men who drink too much—I guess I'm one of 'em."

They were on the steps of the police station now.

"I saw Mayor Strong as he lay in his bed, an hour after he died," said Peanut, slowly. "I guess when I think of him I won't want to try to be a cheap tin sport."

Markham looked at the boy beside him.

"Yes," he said, "Mayor Strong was a good man—and a scrapper, too. You tie up to his memory, and you needn't worry. Well, let's see what's doing on the blotter. After all, we're forgetting business."

They entered the police station together.

CHAPTER XVIII

PEANUT GETS HIS FIRST MURDER STORY AND DISCOVERS SOME THINGS FOR HIMSELF

JUST as they entered the station, the description of a man wanted for murder was being put on the blotter, and the police told to watch for him. This was not at all an uncommon occurrence, but the very brief account of the circumstances excited the reporters' interest.

The murder had evidently been committed the night before, in a lonely dwelling on Staten Island, an island down the harbor from New York, which was settled almost as early as Manhattan itself and is to-day a curious mixture of city suburb and country, with old mansions tucked away in big estates surrounded often by whole streets of modern houses close together. The person murdered was an old man named Samuel Tompkins, who had lived in one of these ancient mansions, with only a single manservant for company and protection. He was supposed to have been very rich, and a miser. The blotter said the manservant was missing, and it was he the police were told to look for.

"Looks like a good yarn," said Markham. "I

think I know that house on Staten Island—a sort of Bleak House, big and mournful back in ~~an~~ old grove of oak trees, and Tompkins was quite a well-known character once—he used to fight all modern improvements on the Island and write long letters to the papers. My Sunday paper had a story about him only a few years ago. Guess we'd better 'phone our offices."

They crossed the street, tipped off the other reporters, and got their city editors on the telephone.

"Our Staten Island man has just sent in word," said Mr. Nichols to Peanut. "You might jump over to the Island, though, and see what you can pick up that's picturesque. I'll send another man over to the station. I'm giving you this assignment, by the way, because there are no older men I can reach just now. Please don't let us get beaten again."

Peanut's face grew hot at this; he actually blushed into the telephone. "Nobody 'll beat me again, sir!" he said.

As he came out of the booth, Markham ~~was~~ also emerging.

"Going?" asked Peanut.

"Yes, are you?"

"Yes."

"Good—come on, let's beat it quick."

They jumped the nearest "L" road to the Battery, ran down the steps, dashed aboard a ferry-boat just

in time, and in less than half an hour more were disembarking on Staten Island. There were half a dozen different trolleys in front of the ferry house, but Markham said none of them went near the place they wished to reach, so they hailed a taxi-cab, jumped in, and told the driver to make speed—which he did, at such a rate that Peanut said it would be lucky if somebody didn't have to write the story of *their* murder.

After twisting and turning up hill and down dale for three or four miles, the driver finally turned in at a drive between two mossy and tumble-down stone posts—and a policeman appeared out of the bushes and halted him so abruptly that he threw on the emergency and jolted both passengers off the seat.

Markham and Peanut showed their reporter's cards, and the officer let them through, but he refused to allow the cab to go on. They paid the driver, and went on up the drive on foot. The drive on both sides was lined with huge oak trees, leafless now, but with branches so thick that they cast a shade and there were drifts of snow beneath them. They walked for several hundred yards, winding down a hollow full of stagnant water and up over a sharp ridge before they came to the house. The house itself was more mournful than the drive and the stagnant water. Great oak trees grew behind and on each side of it, brushing the roof with their branches. The

slates on the roof were green with moss. The house was built of a dull brown sandstone, and the lawn in front had evidently not been cared for in many years, for last year's long dead grass lay in patches amid the broken stems of milkweed and hardhack. Most of the shutters were closed. Behind the house, on one side, a stable was visible.

"Isn't that Bleak House for fair?" asked Markham.

Peanut knew that Bleak House was the name of one of Dickens' novels, but he was ashamed to admit he had never read it.

"It's bleak, all right," he answered, mentally resolving that "Bleak House" would be the next book he bought.

As they drew near the entrance door, a policeman came out on the steps with a reporter whom Markham knew.

"Hello, Mark, this is a weird establishment," said this reporter. "Go in and have a look."

Peanut and Markham entered the great, dim hall, which ran directly through the house to a door at the rear end, which had probably opened on a garden years before. There was no carpet on the floor, and the place was thick with dust. In one corner stood a complete suit of armor, looking like some ghost from the Middle Ages. There were two men in plain clothes from the Police Detective Bureau in the

hall now, besides the coroner and three or four other reporters, the Staten Island local men.

"Where did it happen?" asked Markham.

One of the detectives led him and Peanut to a door, which he opened, disclosing the dining-room. Peanut started in, but the detective caught him by the shoulder.

"We're not through examining the tracks in the dust and the finger prints yet," he said. "We'll need the morning light to-morrow."

The two reporters stared into the dim, high ceilinged room. There was a dining table in the centre, and on one wall a high, black-walnut sideboard. Beyond this sideboard a panel in the wall stood open, and a hole yawned beneath it. Half-way between the door and this open panel something lay on the floor, covered with a sheet.

The detective nodded. "That's the old man," he said. "Whoever killed him was probably at work opening that wall safe, and taking out the contents. It was quite empty when the police arrived. Evidently the old man heard a noise and came into the room, and the man at the safe turned and shot him."

The reporters took careful note of the room, and then had a look at the rest of the house, which the detectives had been searching for clews, and for other wall safes or hidden money.

"Old Tompkins was a miser, all right," the head-

quarters man said. "The milkman, who first discovered something was wrong this morning when he couldn't get in, and when he found the stable was open and the one horse gone, says the servant never paid him, but the old man would disappear into the house, all by himself, and come back with the money mysteriously. Probably there's some around here the servant didn't get, though we haven't found it yet."

They were looking into the bedroom now, with its tumbled bed out of which the old gentleman had evidently climbed to go down-stairs and investigate the noise in the dining-room. His clothes lay on a chair, as he had left them the night before, the stockings and undershirt full of holes. The bedding was dirty, the whole room thick with dust.

"He must have been a tough one," said Peanut, "or he'd have died of dirt long ago."

The kitchen was even worse than the bedroom. The only room in the house which made any pretense to decency or comfort, in fact, was the library. Here there were several leather easy chairs, old but substantial, a good lamp, a beautiful old mahogany desk, and case after case of books. But even here the dust was thick.

Peanut went over to the cases, and looked at some of the titles. He noticed that the tops of the books were thick with dust, but that in one or two instances there ~~was~~ a recent finger print near the back

of the binding, where you'd naturally put your finger to pull the book out of the case.

"The old man had been reading this one not long ago," he said, taking down a copy of Sir Thomas Browne's "Urn Burial."

"We're going to have a look behind all those books presently," the detective said.

Peanut was running idly through the pages, and suddenly he gave a little cry.

"You'd better look *in* 'em, not behind 'em!" he exclaimed. "See here!"

Out from between two pages he lifted a twenty dollar bill, and held it up to the sight of the astonished detective and Markham.

"Call O'Brien, will you, Markham, and that *Tribune* reporter, and shut the door behind you when you come back," cried the detective.

Two minutes later the two officers and the three reporters were taking down the books from the shelves, and going carefully through the pages, putting the money they found in a pile on the desk.

"Twenty dollars from 'Pendennis,'" said Peanut.

"Here's six ones in the *World Almanac*," said Markham. "More'n I ever made out of it!"

"One hundred dollars from the *Century Dictionary*, Volume II," laughed the *Tribune* reporter.

"'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' sixty dollars," Peanut cried.

"The complete works of T. B. Macaulay, in ten volumes, total one hundred and fifteen bones," said a detective.

"The Holy Bible, only two bucks," laughed Markham.

"One thing's sure, the servant evidently didn't read much," Peanut declared.

"I'll bet he'd have been a studious cuss if he'd known," the *Tribune* man replied.

It took them an hour to go through the books, and when they were done, a pile of bills had accumulated on the table which would have filled a bushel basket.

It was getting dark in the room now, and one of the detectives lighted the lamp. One detective and one reporter, each checking the other, counted the pile. There was \$29,460 in it!

"Whew!" said Peanut.

"Now, you boys put that sum down carefully," said the headquarters men, "so there'll be no comeback at us when we turn this in."

They wrapped up the precious pile of paper as best they could, sent the reporters out, and ordered the room locked up.

In the hall they all learned that the police had found the horse and buggy in which the servant had driven away that morning. He had gone to South Beach, and there hired a power dory, leaving the

team as security, and sailed out down toward the Lower Bay. This was very early in the morning. He had with him, so the owner of the boat said, a large leather bag.

"He's got it full of the old man's securities," a detective remarked. "I guess he'd rather have had the cash."

"There's nothing more here now," Markham whispered to Peanut. "We were right in on the cream of this story, thanks to your spotting that first bill in the book. Let's 'phone our papers, and beat it down to South Beach and interview the man who rented him the boat, and then get back to town."

They hurried down the drive, walking a long way before they could find a telephone, to let their papers know of the developments and to have somebody in the city find out what headquarters was doing to spot the boat.

"By this time," Markham said, "the harbor patrol will be out, and every outgoing ship will have been caught by wireless to see if he boarded her."

They could get no car to South Beach, but had to foot it, part way 'cross country, in the rapidly gathering dark, and once there they had to hunt a long time amid the deserted shacks on the ice-bound beach before they discovered the man they were after.

Finally they found him, and he told them all he could, which wasn't much, pointing out the direction

the man took in the power boat, and describing his appearance—a short, dark man of middle age, looking like a foreigner and badly in need of a shave.

Then the two reporters hurried to a train, bought some fruit in the ferry house, and ate that for a hasty supper crossing on the boat to New York.

"See you to-morrow on the same yarn, kid," said Markham, at Park Row.

"Hope so," said Peanut, turning into his own office.

Boss Clarkin came over to him ■■ soon ■■ he entered.

"Well, what have you got?" he asked.

Peanut told him quickly. "Good," said he. "Give it to us as quickly as you can. Just tell what you found when you got there. We'll have a lead ready for it."

Peanut was disappointed that he wasn't going to write the lead himself, but he peeled off his coat and started in at his typewriter to make his part of the story just as vivid as he could. He told exactly what he had seen and discovered, picturing the dark drive, the stagnant water, the mournful house, the dust and dirt, and especially, of course, describing the dining-room, the position of the body, the suppositions of the police about the murder. Then he set about describing the discovery of the first bill in ■ book in the library, and the ensuing search

through all the hundreds of books, putting in scraps of the actual conversation as one man after another turned up a greenback, and giving a list of the volumes in which the largest sums were found, which added a novel touch to the story. Then he ended by describing, as well as he could imagine it from the scene twelve hours later, how the alleged murderer had chugged out from South Beach in an old power dory, with his bag of securities beside him, and disappeared from sight behind Quarantine Island.

Peanut was pretty well tired out when his last sentence was written, for he had gone through a hard, exciting day, and the strain of writing his first big story in New York with Boss Clarkin coming over and taking the sheets of paper as fast as he finished them was a good deal, even for his nerves.

Tom Knight was waiting for him when he finished.

"Come and get some eats, Peanut," he said. "Well, you've landed a real story at last, eh, what?"

"I hope so," said Peanut. "I've got to do something to make up for missing out on that raid yesterday."

Peanut dove for the paper as soon as he awoke the next morning. The paper was left with the bottle of milk outside their door, and he took in

both the bottle and the *Transcript*, and climbed back to bed with the latter, which he read while Tom was still sleeping.

The murder story was on the front page. There was an introduction evidently written in the office, telling the salient facts in simple, direct language, and featuring the search for the supposed murderer by the harbor patrol, by wireless, by the New York police. Then, without a break, as if it had all been written by the same person, the story swung into what Peanut had written, which ran on for almost two columns, and finally the story ended with a little story of Mr. Tompkins' life, telling who he was and what his family had been.

Peanut realized, as he read, that the *Transcript* had its own method of handling a big story, welding together the contributions of several reporters into one continuous whole. The reporters weren't working for their own glory, but for the paper; it was the total effect which counted. But he also realized, from the fact that all he wrote had been used, that he had evidently made good. He got up cheerfully and took his bath.

When he and Tom arrived at the office, two or three of the men greeted him with a "Good work, Peanut!" and joked him about the money, for in the *World* Markham had told who it was that first made the discovery.

"Say, Peanut, find me a library like that, will you?" said Ropes. "All I ever got out of 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' was a headache."

Peanut laughed. He felt very happy. He felt happier still when Mr. Nichols spoke to him.

"You seem to have got along pretty well on the Tompkins story," said he. "Suppose you go down there again to-day, and see what you can pick up. We'll have the police end here covered. The Sunday editor wants to see you before you go."

Peanut grew red with pleasure. Nichols's "pretty well" meant volumes. It almost wiped out the shame of his call down of two days ago. He hurried into the Sunday editor's room.

"Oh, Morrison, you did that Tompkins story, eh?" said the Sunday editor. "I wish, if you're going down there again to-day, you'd take our photographer along. He's going to get some pictures of the house, inside and out, and the grounds. Will you do us a piece for Sunday to go with 'em—a description of the place, and something about its history? I've got some clippings here you can have. I'll leave 'em in your mail box. I'd like copy by to-morrow noon, if you can possibly have it."

"You shall, if I have to sit up all night!" Peanut answered.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT TWO POUNDS OF FLASH-LIGHT POWDER SHOWED

HE and the photographer were soon on their way to Staten Island. From the office of the *Evening Transcript* Peanut had ascertained that as yet there was no clew to the whereabouts of the supposed murderer. The harbor patrol boats had scoured the Upper and Lower Bays, and the police of all the near-by coast and river towns had been on the lookout for the missing power dory, but no trace of it had been discovered as yet. Every ship which left port the day before, and which had a wireless aboard, had been hailed without result. Also, every incoming boat had been questioned, but none of them had picked up a man from a power dory. The afternoon papers were saying that he had probably tried to put out to sea, for a run up or down the coast, and been lost. They were already talking of it as a murder story that would perhaps never be cleared up.

Peanut and the photographer took a taxi-cab once more, and were soon at the entrance to the drive, where they were again halted by the guard. They

went on to the house on foot, the photographer stopping to take a picture of the stagnant water in the hollow.

"It's like 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" he said.

"Another book I've not read," thought Peanut. "I must ask Tom who wrote it, and buy it at once. Golly, I'm ignorant!"

When they reached the house, they found they had come just in time to witness the funeral. The detectives from headquarters had been working all night on their search through the house for more money, papers, etc., and that morning had finished their inspection of the dining-room where the murder was committed, taking measurements of the murderer's tracks in the dust there, and of his fingerprints. They had also taken measurements of his tracks in front of the barn, where he had gone to get the horse. That morning, however, it had rained, washing these tracks out so that Peanut could not see them.

Markham was on the job again, and so was the *Tribune* man. The detectives told them they had been through every nook and cranny in the house, even taking up loose boards in the floor, and had unearthed nothing more except a tobacco box full of loose change and, under a loose brick on the hearth, the old man's will, which left all his property to the Borough of Richmond (Staten Island), the land to be

used as a public park, the interest on the personal estate to keep it in order. His will said he wouldn't have any sardine boxes built on this land, nor his trees cut down, and if anybody tried it, his ghost would return and burn up the houses.

"What a funny old chap!" laughed Markham.

"I don't know whether he was or not," said Peanut. "I kind of admire him. I guess he loved these old oaks, and it would be a crime to cut 'em down. There are sardine boxes enough in this city—and not half enough parks."

"There's something in that," Markham answered. "Anyhow, it makes a good story. But if they don't catch the murderer with the securities, there's only the \$29,000 to keep the park up on."

The undertaker had now finished his work, and the coffin was being brought out by police officers, to be placed in the municipal hearse. There were no mourners except the police, the plain-clothes men, and the little group of reporters, for the public were not allowed on the place, though a great crowd of curious folk had congregated at the entrance gate. As the coffin came out of the door, Peanut took off his hat, and the rest followed suit. The photographer had mounted his camera and took three or four pictures. Then the hearse drove away.

"Coming?" asked Markham of Peanut, as the little group prepared to depart.

"I've got to stick around with the photographer, while he gets some pictures of the house for Sunday," said Peanut.

"If you're going to take any interiors, hurry up, then," said the police sergeant. "We are going to lock the house up now."

The photographer hurried inside, and took a few time exposures. As he was taking the last one, something broke in his shutter. He came outside muttering, and tried to fix it, but it was evidently broken badly.

"Thunder," he said, "I'll have to go back for another camera, for I've not got any picture of the outside of the house yet, and that's what they want more than anything!"

"It'll be pretty late before you can get back, won't it?" said Peanut.

"Hang it all, yes. I could get the picture with a couple of pounds of flash-light powder, though. It would be kind of a weird picture—just fit the place."

"Say! that would be some stunt. I'd like to see that!"

"You'll have to see it. I'll need help. If you don't want to go 'way back to town with me, can't you 'phone your story in? I'll explain at the office. Here, help me locate a spot to take it from now, while we have light."

They went out in front of the house, three hundred

feet or more away from it, and between two bushes which were near the path, so they could be found in the dark, the photographer set up his tripod, and fixed a pointer showing the exact direction in which to aim his camera. Then they marked with a stone on the edge of the drive the spot to turn off to reach this tripod, and he and Peanut went down the drive, explaining to the patrolman left on guard at the gate that they were coming back, and why.

Peanut then hunted up a 'phone to send in a story about the will, and the photographer went back to New York for a new camera and the flash-light equipment.

After he had 'phoned in his story, and bought some food for his supper, Peanut went back to the house. The afternoon sun was getting low, and the great bare oaks were casting long shadows over the dead grass. The closed house, with the shutters barred, was dismal and melancholy. Peanut could not help shivering a little, though he laughed at himself for it.

He went around the house on the outside, trying the cellar door and the back door to see if they were locked. They were. Then he strolled out to the barn. This, too, had been closed and locked. He tried the big door, and it did not budge. Evidently the police had found a key to it. He went around to the rear of the stable, where the ground dropped

away, and something there suddenly arrested his attention.

It was a cracker box, one of those five cent paper packages which are so common. It had evidently been dropped through the trap under the horse stall, and had fallen on the manure pile and rolled just outside of the edge of the barn. This wouldn't have been in any way remarkable, if it hadn't been for the fact that the paper on the box was fresh and crisp—and early that morning it had rained!

"Of course, one of the policemen threw it there," thought Peanut. Then he added to himself, "But who ever saw policemen on duty eating soda crackers?"

It occurred to him that he had once read about a murderer who returned at once to the scene of his crime, and hid under the very house for weeks, while the police were searching the country for miles around. Perhaps this murderer was in the barn at the very moment! Again Peanut felt a shiver go down his spine. He didn't wholly relish the idea.

But what a scoop for his paper if he could prove this!

The only way to get into the barn now was evidently to go up a little ladder by the manure pile and lift the trap by the stalls. Peanut hesitated a long moment, then jammed his hat down hard, grit his teeth, and started up.

He pushed very gently and softly at first on the

trap, but it did not stir. He pushed harder and harder, finally realizing that it was somehow fastened from above.

"Well, I'll admit I'm not so terribly sorry," he told himself, and climbed down.

He now went very cautiously and quietly around the barn, making sure there were no other openings, and walked back to the bushes where they had placed the tripod. Here he could keep an eye on both the house and stable, and by staying behind a bush could not be seen himself.

He sat down, ate his own crackers and some fruit, and waited for the photographer, as night crept on and the air grew cold and damp.

Then he began to wonder if it weren't up to him to tip off the police. He had no proof yet, to be sure, and there might be nothing at all in his clew. The more he thought of it, the more unlikely it seemed that the murderer would have come back, the very next day, when the place was full of police. Besides, the police had been in the stable not four hours ago. Furthermore, how could he have got back without somebody finding his boat?

Peanut finally resolved to wait till the photographer got back, anyhow, and get his advice. Possibly when the flash-light went off it would bring some action from the person hidden in the barn—if there were anybody hidden there.

Night had come on almost completely before he heard a step on the drive, and went out from his bushes to see if it were the photographer. It was. He stopped the other man in the middle of a loud greeting, and told him in a low voice what he had discovered under the barn.

The photographer drew in his breath in a whistle, as he set down his heavy load of flash-light powder, fuses, reflectors and camera.

"Gosh!" he said. "Hope he doesn't take a pot shot at us!"

"He'd have a swell chance of hitting us in this darkness," Peanut answered. "But if we work quietly, so he doesn't hear us, and let everything quiet down after we've fixed the powder ready to explode, so's he'll think we're gone if he *did* hear us fixing it, maybe the flash will show him, or—or something. Anyway, it's worth trying. If we could get a beat, it would be some stunt!"

"Say, I'm a photographer, not a detective," said the other man. "I don't care for lead pills. However, we've got to get this picture. Hang that old busted shutter, anyhow! I don't relish this place at night. Come on, let's hurry."

Peanut helped the photographer mount his camera on the tripod, holding a little electric pocket lamp for him, screened from the barn by his body. When the camera was mounted and properly pointed, they

crept stealthily up the drive to a point near the house and the photographer fixed the two pounds of flash-light powder in three pans, with a fuse running back behind a bush from each of them. He used three, some feet apart, to diffuse the light as much as possible. Behind each pan he placed a tin reflector.

"Now, you stay behind this bush, where the match won't be seen when you light the fuses," said he. "I'll go back to the camera, and presently I'll open her up and hoot like an owl. That's my one imitation. When you hear me hoot, light the fuses, and stay behind the bush till the flashes are over. You'd be seen if you got out—it will be some flash, believe me! Better keep your eyes shut, or look the other way."

"Don't hoot for five minutes," Peanut whispered back. "If there's anybody 'round give him a chance to think we've gone, provided he's heard us."

The photographer stole back to his camera, and Peanut crouched behind the bush. The minutes passed. There was no sound anywhere but the wind in the bare trees, and the distant rumble of trolleys from the streets. The house and barn, the roofs of which he could dimly see against the sky, were quite still.

Suddenly Peanut heard an owl hoot. The imitation was so good that it startled him, and he almost dropped the box of matches from his fingers. But

he quickly struck a match and touched off the end of the fuses, which spluttered rapidly up under the protection of the dead weeds along the edge of the drive, where they had hidden them, and two or three seconds later there was a loud explosion and the most terrific blast of blinding white light Peanut had ever experienced, followed by a second and a third. He had been waiting for that flash, however, with his eyes fixed on the barn.

And before the flashes were over, and the cloud of white smoke went up against the night sky, he had seen that the barn door was open, and a man was coming out of it—a short, dark man, looking like a foreigner!

The darkness following the flashes seemed darker than ever. Peanut sprang up and rushed back along the drive to the place where the camera stood.

“Quick!” he whispered. “Did you see? The murderer coming out of the barn! Beat it for the cop!”

The photographer needed no second invitation. With his camera still on the tripod under his arm, the two of them ran down the drive as fast as they dared in the darkness, and came panting up to the policeman who was still on guard to keep possible marauders out. Peanut told him their story.

“Whew!” said he. “It doesn’t seem possible, but I’ll call up the station. Come on, you with the cam-

era, and develop your picture and see what you got."

"It may not show the stable," said the photographer.

"Well, you take a chance. Come on, quick!"

The patrolman hurried them to the nearest police telephone, and called up. In ten or twelve minutes the captain and six men were there in an automobile. The photographer was rushed back in the motor to develop his picture.

"Rout out any photographer on the island and order him to open his dark room!" said the captain to the patrolman driving the machine.

A moment later a second machine came up, loaded with reserves. On the rear seat was something Peanut saw was a search-light. This machine was sent to the entrance drive. The rest of the force was sent all around the estate, and ordered to close in on the house and stable from different directions. A third load of reserves which came up was stationed at intervals along the wall enclosing the estate to see that no one escaped from it, not a difficult thing to detect even at night, for the four streets which surrounded the gloomy spot were brightly lighted with arc lamps. Peanut was allowed to go with the automobile.

When he turned in at the drive, the chauffeur dimmed down his lights and crept as quietly as possible up through the gloomy oaks till the car reached

the open space before the house. Then, suddenly, the operator of the search-light sent out a great beam of light which seemed to spring forth with a hiss and hit the house first, jumping it into uncanny prominence against the surrounding dark. From the house the beam leaped to the stable, just in time to let all three of the occupants of the car see that the stable door was just closing to!

“I saw a hand on it, pulling it shut!” cried Peanut, trembling with excitement.

“Somebody’s in there, all right!” the driver answered. “Keep it on the barn, Bill. Show up both sides a little if you can, so he can’t get away.”

“There’s only one other way out,” said Peanut—“a trap down at that rear right hand corner.”

“The chief knows that. Keep your beam so it lights that corner, Bill.”

An officer now came out of the darkness into the dim radiation behind the search-light.

“Somebody in the barn, all right,” said the driver of the car. “We saw the door closing and a hand on it, just as we flashed our beam.”

The officer went away into the dark again, and presently, out of the dark, Peanut heard the captain’s voice, close to the barn, crying :

“Whoever you are inside, come out and surrender to the law!”

Then a silence fell, broken only by the hiss of the search-light.

"Once more I command you to come out!" the captain cried.

Again there was no response.

"Break in the door and take him, men!" Peanut heard the sharp command. He saw several figures start forward out of the dark—and at the same instant there came a flash from a hole in the side of the barn, over the door, and the report of a rifle.

"Hello!" cried the man at the wheel of the car, "he's going to stand a siege, eh?"

"What ■ story!" was the thought that went through Peanut's brain. "Oh, I must get to ■ telephone pretty quick. This is ■ beat for fair!"

CHAPTER XX

THE SIEGE OF THE BARN

HE looked at his watch. It was past nine o'clock. He still had time to see some of the fight. Also, he realized, the Staten Island correspondents might have time to hear about it, and get to the scene in time for the morning papers. But, anyway, it was he who made the first discovery, and he was the only reporter on the spot when the story broke. He'd have the cream of it. He danced up and down on the path with excitement as the policemen's revolvers spoke in answer to the shot from the barn, the flashes spitting from the darkness where they had retreated, the splinters flying on the barn.

Meanwhile the driver and the search-light operator had jumped out of the car, and dragged Peanut with them to one side, behind a tree.

"He'll fire for the light," they said.

Sure enough, a second later they heard the zing-g-g of a bullet close by them, and then another, better aimed, which crashed through the wind shield of the car.

"Hello, he's getting good," said the driver. "But

he can't aim into that search-light long and keep his eyesight."

In fact, the firing ceased from the front of the barn. The police had been busy trying to open up a breach at the rear, and the man inside was driven to turn his fire in that direction. Peanut took advantage of this to sneak up along the edge of the darkness and get nearer the actual besiegers.

"Let us rush him, chief," he heard one of the patrolmen begging as he came up. "Mike and me can get in under his fire along the wall, and heave that door in with our shoulders."

"No!" said the captain. "As long as he's armed and shooting, I'm not going to send any of my men in. What's the use? We've got him here, and we can starve him out if need be."

"Aw, chief, it's a joke—one poor guy standin' off the whole force! All the papers 'll josh us!"

"Wouldn't you rather be a joke than a stiff?" asked the captain. "Ah, here comes the apparatus!"

There was a sudden clanging of bells and coughing of motors down the drive, and a police ambulance bringing more reserves, a fire engine, a ladder truck, and the fire department search-light arrived. As they came over the crest to the open space in front of the house and barn, their head-lights glowing, the murderer met them with a volley, and from the

darkness near the barn the police replied with their Colts, aiming at the loophole through which he was shooting, so that the splinters flew all around it. The great pencil of the search-light, throwing the barn into high relief, the spits of flame from the revolvers, the sparks from the fire engine, the crack of the rifle and revolvers, made up an exciting scene, not less exciting because nobody could feel sure a stray bullet wouldn't hit him any second.

Indeed, a moment later, one patrolman, standing beside Peanut, did get winged in the hand, and was ordered to the ambulance for treatment.

"Gosh! If I'm going to get a story sent in, I'd better keep to cover," Peanut reflected, and after that he kept behind trees as much as he could, though in his excitement he constantly forgot.

The fire department search-light was now brought around behind the barn, and played on it from the other side, so that the building was in full illumination, almost as bright as day. Escape was impossible.

"Are you ready?" the captain called to the firemen, who, Peanut found, had laid one line of hose to the house and two more close to the barn.

"All right!"

"Let her go!"

Two policemen suddenly dashed in under the barn, while the rest were keeping the murderer busy

at the front with a fusillade of shots. These two carried bundles of dried grass they had collected, and a moment later the flames could be seen licking up into the dust under the flooring.

Peanut had worked around to the side of the chief.

"Going to burn him out?" he asked.

"Yes—any one of my men's lives is worth more than that barn," the captain replied. Then he suddenly seemed to realize who Peanut was.

"Say, you have no business here now," he cried. "This is dangerous. Get back to the road!"

"But I found him for you!" Peanut exclaimed.

"I don't care if you did—get back."

"All right," said Peanut.

He left the chief quickly, took a dozen steps into the dark, and was successfully hidden behind a tree.

"I'm likely to leave this story!" he laughed to himself.

The barn was old and dry. In an astonishingly short time the flames had eaten through the floor.

"Give it air inside!" called a fireman. "Shoot out those two upper windows!"

On both ends of the barn were windows, near the roof tree, and two volleys from the police revolvers followed his words, and the glass went crashing in. At the same time other firemen began to play a hose

on the side and roof of the house, to wet them down if the sparks flew.

"The door ought to come down, too," Peanut heard the firemen say.

Two policemen, with firemen's axes, sneaked in close to the wall of the barn, so close that the murderer inside could not point his gun down on them, and swung with all their might. A few blows, and the door gave way, three wide boards falling inward and making a breach four feet across. Out of this opening poured a sudden rush of smoke, and the policemen sprang back.

"He'll either come out now or he'll never come out!" Peanut heard the captain say.

When the door had crashed in, there had come two shots from the interior, but no more followed. The police did not fire. Everybody was watching the door, or the trap behind the barn.

And then, suddenly, like a strange apparition from a fiery furnace, for the interior of the barn was red with burning hay, the fugitive appeared in the entrance. He held both hands up over his head in token of surrender. His face was covered with blood, and he seemed dazed and fainting with the smoke.

Four policemen sprang toward him, and dragged him away, while at the same instant the firemen rushed two streams into the barn, and there was the

hot hiss of water meeting flame, and a fresh volcano of smoke.

Peanut ran over to where the chief and the police were surrounding the prisoner, who now lay on the ground, in the glare of the search-lights, while the ambulance doctor examined him, wiping his face.

"Only a splinter wound on the forehead," the doctor said, "and overcome a bit by the smoke."

"Is it the servant? Is it the right man?" Peanut asked.

The captain turned. "I sent you back to the road!" he exclaimed. "Yes, it's the right man. Now you get!"

But he half laughed as he spoke.

"Well, he had all the securities, you know, in a bag," said Peanut. "I'd like to see if they are in the barn before I 'get.'"

The captain bit his lip and swore. He had, Peanut realized, forgotten those securities in his desire to save the lives of his men by burning the murderer out instead of rushing him.

Now he gave some quick, sharp orders. The firemen redoubled their efforts. The barn was not badly burned, as most of the fire hadn't got beyond the hay when the fugitive surrendered. Now the firemen plunged inside, smashing the door completely down and bringing up a search-light to the entrance. They made a quick search of the place,

poking into the smoking hay where the murderer had evidently concealed himself, and finally emerging with the charred remains of a leather bag, which still contained two tin boxes such as deeds and bonds and other valuable papers are kept in.

“That’s it!” cried the chief. “Here, I’ll take those myself. Come now, into the ambulance with him.”

Peanut looked at his watch, and uttered an exclamation. It was forty minutes past eleven! And the first edition went to press at 12:15!

He didn’t stop to see anything more, but dashed at top speed down the drive and kept on running till he saw the lights of a drug store. He bolted into the store, which the proprietor was just about to close up, sprang to the public telephone, got the *Transcript*, and began dictating his story, or rather telling it to Tom Knight, who, by good luck, was assigned to take it on the other end, panting for breath between sentences.

The proprietor of the store, who had been too astonished by Peanut’s cyclonic entrance to speak, drew near and listened, for this telephone had no booth.

“I—I can’t dictate it, Tom,” Peanut panted. “You fix it up. Here’s just what happened. I was the only reporter there. Don’t know what became of Jones, the photographer, with the picture. He never showed up again. Have the Staten Island

man cover whatever happens after they get the guy to the station. Ready? All right—here's the facts ——”

He told the story as well as he could, and it took half an hour, with Tom stopping him every few minutes to hand sheets of copy to somebody at his elbow, or to tell them facts. When he hung up the receiver, and looked at the drug store clock, which registered twenty minutes past twelve, he was conscious of only one thought—would Tom get any of that into the first edition? If he could, the *Transcript* would probably beat the town, for none of the other reporters could get the story till the police arrived back at the station house with the prisoner, and even then they couldn't have a first hand account.

Then Peanut saw the druggist, who was smoking a cigar behind the counter and looking at him.

“That little chat 'll cost you about a dollar and seventy-five cents,” said the man.

“It's worth it,” said Peanut. “Sorry to keep you up, sir, but the news is pretty important.”

“Don't mind—I was interested,” the man laughed. “Poor old Tompkins—he used to buy stuff of me—a queer dick he was, always quoting Latin. Smoked five cent cigars, for all his money. Have a hot chocolate, young man?”

“You bet!” Peanut cried.

He drank the hot chocolate eagerly, and laid down his coin.

"On the house," said the druggist. "Got to stand in with the press."

"Thanks," Peanut said. "The press is much obliged. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night. By the way, what's your paper?"

"The *Transcript*."

"Just wanted to know, so's I could buy it in the morning, and see if they put in what you said."

He began turning out the lights as Peanut went out to the sidewalk and hurried toward a car line. He was nearly four miles from the ferry house, and there were no cabs in that part of the island. It was fifteen minutes before any car came, and when it did come it took him by a roundabout route to the ferry, where he had to wait another half hour for a boat, for it was now after one o'clock. It was after two when he reached New York, and he was deadly sleepy, but so hungry that he had to stop for a bite to eat before going home.

At the Benedick he left a call to be waked at seven o'clock, for he had his Sunday story to write before noon, and stole up-stairs into his room, so as not to waken Tom. But Tom was sitting up for him in pajamas, reading.

"Hello, Peanut!" he cried. "Say, you certainly have put one over! Jones got back with that flash-

light picture as I was taking down your story, and it showed the man in the barn door, and they got it into the second edition. We got a piece of your story into the first, with all the main facts, and beat the town on it. See, here it is! The other papers in their first only had the fact that the police were besieging somebody in the barn with revolvers and search-lights. And say, your eye-witness stuff will make their seconds look sick! You lucky dog, you."

"Oh, Tom, I wish you'd been there, too!" cried Peanut. "Say, it was some exciting, believe me!"

"Yes, and I'll bet you're some tired now."

"You win," said Peanut. "And I've got to get up at seven, too, and do a Sunday piece."

"And yet some folks think reporters don't work!" laughed Tom, as he kicked off his slippers, and climbed into bed.

Peanut, as he undressed, took a look at the first edition, with his story in big head-lines on the first page. But he didn't read it. He was already thinking about the Sunday story he had to write in the morning.

CHAPTER XXI

PEANUT LEAVES THE CUB CLASS AND STARTS A BANK ACCOUNT

THE next morning he dressed and stole out of the room for breakfast, so that he wouldn't disturb Tom's sleep, and read the *Transcript* propped up against a sugar bowl in front of him. He also bought all the other morning papers and compared them. The other papers, in their city editions, had the main facts, but no two stories quite agreed, because the reporters had written them from what the police told, not as eye-witnesses of the siege. Peanut's story, as Tom had written it down over the telephone, was easily the most vivid, just because he had been on the spot in person, and also it contained what the others didn't—an exact account of how the man was first discovered to be in the barn. Peanut didn't take any undue credit to himself, for after all it was an accident which had kept him behind. If the shutter of Jones's camera hadn't broken, the murderer would doubtless be in the barn still. He hadn't thought of that before.

"What little, insignificant things big events sometimes depend on!" he said to himself.

When he got to the office, he reported to the Sunday editor, telling him this new thought.

"Good!" said the editor. "Make that your lead. Tell how the breaking of the shutter on the camera that took these pictures we are running really caught the murderer. Then you can slide into your description of the house and grounds. Here's a batch of old clippings about its history which may help you. I can stand a couple of columns."

Peanut worked industriously from quarter of nine till one o'clock, and finished just as the men were coming in for their assignments. He had had but three and a half hours' sleep the night before, but he seemed to be perfectly fresh.

"Excitement, I guess," he thought.

Mr. Nichols nodded to him as he went up with the others to look at the assignment book.

"The Tompkins story seems pretty well cleared up," said the city editor. "Our Staten Island man just 'phoned in that they've found the power dory in the mud and grass up a tide inlet. He just ran around the island, and came ashore again. Bullets flying thick last night, eh?"

"Pretty thick," Peanut laughed, coloring with pleasure. The city editor was talking to him familiarly, with the other, older reporters standing around listening. It seemed to him as if he were

being admitted into their circle, as if he were being graduated out of the cub class.

"Didn't it give you the fidgets?" somebody asked.

"Oh, I got behind a tree whenever I thought of it," Peanut said. "Funny, but when you're excited like that you just don't think anything about any danger to yourself. The cops would have rushed right into the barn if the captain had let 'em. They were just spilling to. New York cops may be grafters, for all I know, but they certainly have nerve, all right."

Peanut found, when he consulted the book, that he wasn't assigned to the station house job again, but was evidently to be on general assignment. He was delighted at this. In the first place, he didn't particularly care to meet Sweeney any more than he had to, and, moreover, he didn't much like the life, hanging about in the reporters' house opposite the station, with the loafing and card playing and cheap talk which went on there. Peanut had learned since he was graduated from high school a good many things in the school of life, and one of them was that the men who loaf and gamble and drink and tell cheap stories are not the ones who make good in the world, who get the big jobs and win the respect of their editors or employers. So he was glad to be taken off the station post, and put at general reporting, which had, besides, much more variety and took him around the city more.

That afternoon, for instance, he was sent up to the N. Y., N. H. and H. freight yards to write a piece about the detrainment of the circus animals, which were to be brought down to the Madison Square Garden for the opening of the circus next day. He knew that, in this story, the more fun he could find the better, so he made his story the tale of Lucy, the young elephant, on her first trip to New York. He interviewed Lucy to get her impressions of the city. Lucy said the March climate was very trying to one accustomed to equatorial Africa, and all the people on the streets seemed very pale. She also found the pavements uncomfortable, and wondered why the cliff walls all had ~~so~~ much mica in them, and where the forests were. Lucy became very much excited at the sight of her first automobile, which she thought was her old friend Alcibiades, the rhinoceros. She endeavored to kiss it on the nose with her trunk, but ~~as~~ it had just been running and the radiator was very hot, she scorched herself and became morose and suspicious, and had to be placated with a bag of peanuts.

In the next few weeks Peanut had a wide variety of assignments, some of them small and insignificant, some of them important. He began to get better acquainted with the city, and with its myriad activities. He also continued his reading, never being without a book to read on the cars, or while waiting

in offices. He read "Bleak House" first, and then Poe's marvelous story, "The Fall of the House of Usher." Then he got more of Poe, and read all his stories, realizing that Poe was one of the most vivid descriptive writers who ever lived.

He also found a note from the managing editor in his box one morning, raising his pay to twenty dollars a week. As he had some assignment from the Sunday editor almost every week, or else picked up good funny stories at some banquet which he had to cover, or even "human interest" yarns on the streets or subway as he traveled about with his eyes open, he found that he now averaged close to thirty dollars a week. Tom was getting twenty-five dollars a week in salary, and also selling to the Sunday paper, so between them they were able to buy a new desk and easy chair for their room, and on their day off to go for dinner to a good hotel, where they had big napkins and snowy table-cloths and the best of food.

Peanut also began to put at least one dollar a week in a savings bank, sometimes as much as five or even ten dollars. That was a trick he had learned from his Boy Scout days. He persuaded Tom to do the same thing, and every Saturday morning (Friday was pay day) the two reporters stopped at the bank on their way down-town and made a deposit.

"My dad still has a mortgage on our house back home," Peanut said to Tom. "It's a little one, but it troubles him and Ma. Next Christmas I'm going to give 'em the surprise of their lives!"

"Good for you," Tom replied. "My dad hasn't got any mortgage to pay. I don't know what I'll do with my vast fortune. Maybe I'll take you on a trip to Europe."

"Very generous of you," Peanut laughed. "In your steam yacht, I suppose?"

"Why not?" said Tom. "Might as well go the whole hog while we're dreaming."

The two reporters went on their way down-town to the *Transcript* office, laughing and joking. The world seemed to Peanut a very good place to live in those days.

CHAPTER XXII

OFF TO THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS ON AN EXCITING STORY

IT was in April that Peanut's next chance at excitement came.

The afternoon papers appeared one day with an extraordinary story from the Tennessee Mountains. A moonshiner named Abington was being tried in the district court (a moonshiner is a man who makes illicit whiskey, without paying the excise tax to the United States government). The trial was proceeding in the usual fashion when suddenly the defendant's two brothers came through the door armed with rifles, made everybody in the room hold up his hands, shot the United States marshal dead when he refused and offered resistance, and walked out with the prisoner. The astonished local sheriff then came to, and rushed, with some of the crowd, in pursuit. The three Abingtons fought a running battle, during which the rescued prisoner was killed, but not before they had killed the sheriff and badly wounded four of the other pursuers. The other two brothers got away into the mountain fastnesses, and

now, according to the afternoon papers, a posse was being organized by United States marshals and revenue officers to hunt them down systematically.

The Sunday editor had come in and was conferring with Mr. Nichols at one o'clock, when Peanut and Tom arrived at the office. Peanut's name was not on the assignment book, and presently the city editor called to him.

"The Sunday department wants a story about the chase after these two Abington brothers," Mr. Nichols said. "This moonshine business is old stuff, of course, but the southern highlands seem to be still a land of mystery to the North, and this particular case is rather picturesque. Now, you appear to like gun fire, and you know how to take care of yourself in the open better than any of the staff, except Tom Knight, perhaps, and I can't spare him just now. It's probably a tough and maybe a dangerous assignment. Want to take it?"

Peanut, who had for two or three years read all he could get hold of about the mountains of eastern America, could scarcely suppress a cry of joy.

"Do I!" he exclaimed. "I've read a lot about the southern Appalachians; I got interested in those hills after I climbed the White Mountains and somebody told me there were mountains higher than Mount Washington down in Virginia and North Carolina. Besides, those southern mountaineers are

Scotch-Irish from Ulster, and my grandmother came from Ulster. Do I want to go!"

"Well, go in and see the Sunday editor, then. He'll want you to start right away. Of course, if you get any definite news, send a brief wire to the daily. But we don't want any extended story."

Peanut, almost trembling with excitement, rushed into the Sunday editor's room, and talked over the story. Then he rushed home to pack his bag, while his tickets were being arranged for, and at four o'clock he was at the Pennsylvania Station, with his equipment. He took his khaki clothes, a heavy sweater, stout shoes, his small shoulder pack and collapsible cooking kit, and some tinned provisions, tea, bouillon, bacon, etc., which he bought on his way to the station at a camp-outfitting store. At first he intended to buy an automatic pistol, but refrained.

"No," he thought, "nobody's going to molest me, and if I'm unarmed they're certainly less likely to than if I'm toting a shooting iron."

Presently he climbed aboard a Pullman, and was on his way south.

It was dark, of course, when the train reached Washington, and soon after Peanut went to bed. When he woke up in the morning the train was going through a new world. He dressed hastily, and sat at breakfast in the dining-car, almost forgetting to eat as he looked out of the window.

The train was pulling up through a narrow valley in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Steep hills rose up high on either side, and in gaps between them every now and then Peanut could see the great blue peaks of the high summits beyond. The valley itself was full of farms. The reddish soil, newly ploughed, showed in checker-board squares, alternating with squares of vivid green winter wheat. Above the fields was the timber, the leaves already showing, though back in the North the trees were still bare. The farmhouses were quite different from northern farmhouses—smaller, rougher, and for the most part unpainted. Some of them were hardly more than cabins.

Presently, when the train stopped, Peanut went out on the platform, and drew in a great breath of the dry mountain air.

"Wow! This is good after New York!" he exclaimed, aloud.

On the platform were several men in rough clothes, with big black slouch hats on their heads, and their speech was different from northern speech.

The train sped on, down the slope into the wide valley between the Great Smokies and the Tennessee Cumberlands. All across the eastern horizon lay the hazy blue wall of the Great Smokies, perhaps ten or fifteen miles from the train. They looked very high, higher even than the White Mountains (as, indeed,

some of them are), and very alluring and mysterious in the spring haze. Peanut realized, from this haze, why they are called the Great Smokies.

At Knoxville he bought a paper to see if the Abington brothers had been caught yet. They hadn't—not at the hour of going to press the night before, at any rate. According to the story, the posse had split up into three bands in its search. The whole party had just beat down through Abington Cove, where the brothers lived, failed to find them there, and then split to scour the wilder country.

"Gee, I hope the story isn't all over before I get there!" Peanut thought.

It was late afternoon before he reached the little branch line which was to take him up into the mountains, and evening as the train of two cars pulled away from the main line and began to ascend the Cumberland plateau of Tennessee. The locomotive chugged and puffed and coughed up the steep grade. Looking out of the window, Peanut could see nothing but forests, with now and then a break where the track climbed along the side of a ravine and he could look down one, two, three hundred feet, perhaps, to the white flash of a waterfall, just glimpsed in the last of the daylight. After an hour of this ascent, the engine stopped laboring, and Peanut realized that they were on a level, though it ■■■

now dark. They ran north, with two or three stops at tiny stations, for another hour, a distance of twenty miles, to the terminal at Mineville, where Peanut climbed out and gazed about him.

Mineville was the town where the trial had been held and the marshal shot down. It got its name from the fact that there were coal and iron mines near by. Peanut didn't expect it to be a large place, but it was even smaller than he thought it would be. Standing on the platform of the railroad station, he could literally see the entire town. The one street, lighted only by a few oil lamps on posts, ran right past the depot. Across this street Peanut saw a couple of stores. There was also a building labeled "Hotel." The moon was due to rise shortly, so that the sky was light, and Peanut could detect beyond the hotel a white building with tall columns in front which he fancied was the court house. Beyond that he could dimly see a few houses, and then the street appeared to vanish into the fields and woods.

"Some metropolis!" he reflected, starting across the road to the hotel.

This road, the main street of Mineville, was not only unpaved, but it had no dressing either of trap rock or gravel. It was just a series of deep ruts in the red, clay soil.

"What do the motors do when they hit this?" Peanut thought.

He now entered the hotel. The office was a small dingy room, opening directly off the plank sidewalk, filled with men sitting around smoking. As he came in, every pair of eyes in the place was fixed on him, and conversation abruptly ceased. This was a little disconcerting. But Peanut walked over to the rough counter, set down his bag, and looked around for the proprietor.

That official rose from a chair, and came toward him.

"Howdy," he said, with a peculiar drawl Peanut was to know well before he left this mountain country. "You-uns is from the North, I reckon."

"Just in from New York," said Peanut. He was acutely conscious that every man in the room was listening to him, and any private conversation was impossible. "I'm a reporter for the New York *Transcript*," he added. "My paper sent me down here to follow the posse that's after the Abington brothers. Do you suppose I can get to that posse to-night? They haven't caught 'em yet, have they?"

There was a moment of silence in the room. Peanut could feel it as a hostile silence. He fancied that perhaps they were hostile to him because he was an outsider, come in here "to write them up." He realized that before he could get any help he would have to overcome this hostility.

"No, they ain't caught 'em yet," the hotel pro-

prietor said, finally. "I reckon you-uns don' know much about the land 'round hyur. You couldn't git to no posse at night no more'n Judas Iscariot could climb outer hell."

"But I can get a team or an automobile to drive me over near 'em in the morning, can't I?"

There came a slow, quiet chuckle from the men in the room.

"Automobile!" somebody said. "Thar was a northern feller come hyur onct in an automobile. Hi McBee's got the engine now, with a belt on the fly wheel, a-cuttin' of his wood. Runs a saw real nice, too."

Peanut laughed, and also made a mental note of the speech, as a good description of the roads.

"Well, I've got two legs," he said. "Can I put up here for the night?"

"I reckon so," said the proprietor, twisting a battered register around on the counter.

Peanut signed his name, while one of the men in the room, pretending to get a match, looked over his shoulder. The proprietor made no motion to show him to his room. A buzz of talk arose in the office. Finally a tall, lean man with a drooping moustache turned directly to Peanut, and asked:

"Why do you-uns in the North care what we-uns down hyur do, a-sendin' down reporters to write about us?"

Peanut thought a second before he answered. He felt that whether or not he got help in Mineville depended a good deal on his reply.

"Well," he finally said, "it's this way, I guess—it takes a lot of nerve to shoot up a court and walk off with the prisoner. Nobody up our way's got the nerve to try it. You were all interested yourselves, weren't you? We're not so different from you. There are some people right in New York that down in the bottom of their hearts would be glad to see the Abington brothers get away, because of their sheer courage, just as when I was a boy we used to think Jesse James was a hero."

"You-uns in the North thought Jesse James was a hero?" somebody enquired. "Wall, he *wore* a hero, spite o' what he done, I reckon. I didn' know you-uns thought so, though."

Peanut felt that his mention of Jesse James had somehow been a happy inspiration. He could sense a lessening of the hostile atmosphere.

"I'm not down here to 'write you up,' as you put it," he went on. "I'm not that kind of a fresh guy. All I'm sent to do is to pick up that posse and follow the hunt, if I can, because people all over the country are interested."

"We don' mean no harm, young feller," the original speaker said, more mildly. "But we-uns down hyur love almighty well to be let alone."

Thar's a couple of reporters from the Atlanta and Chattanooga papers with the posse now, ain't there, Bill?"

"Reckon they stuck," said the hotel proprietor, "ef their legs wore good enough."

"My legs are all right," Peanut laughed. "All I want is somebody to tell me how to catch up with 'em in the morning, early."

The long, lank man came over and held a low conversation with the proprietor, who nodded slowly in assent.

"Come with me, young feller," the long, lank one said to Peanut a moment later, leading the way outdoors.

Peanut followed, wonderingly. His guide walked with long strides up the plank sidewalk till the planking ceased, and then along a bumpy dirt track, past a tiny wooden church now plainly visible in the moonlight, to the small frame house next door. Here he knocked, and they were admitted by a pleasant-faced, middle-aged man, in the garments of an Episcopal clergyman, to a small, clean study, lit by a big oil student's lamp. The clergyman had been reading; an open book lay on the table.

"Howdy, Tom," said the minister.

"Howdy, Mr. Walker," the long, lank man answered. "Here's a young feller says he's a reporter from New York, come ter foller the posse. Wants

we-uns should tell him how he's goin' to ketch up with 'em. We-uns down to Bill's reckoned you might wise him up a bit."

The rector shook hands pleasantly with Peanut, and invited him to be seated. Tom wouldn't sit. He shuffled his hat from one hand to the other a moment, and then, catching the rector's eye, winked and went out.

Peanut saw the wink and believed it meant, "Find out if this chap's on the level."

"My, but they're a suspicious lot!" he thought to himself.

He and the clergyman then had a long, frank talk. The latter was a southerner, a mountaineer himself, but he had been well educated, and had returned to this little town to be a missionary among his people.

"I make trips through these mountains for twenty or thirty miles in every direction," he said. "Where I can't drive my horse, I ride him. Where I can't ride him, I walk. I carry the mountain people medicine, and spiritual comfort. I'm working all the time to give them schools. But what they really need most is roads, as you'll see in the morning."

Then he talked to Peanut for a long while about the mountain people.

"They are a proud, sensitive folk," he said, "and

almighty independent. They hate the intrusion of any 'furriners' in their affairs. You saw how right here in Mineville, where we get the papers every day, the men resented your coming to write us up. But of course I know we've got to be written up. If we are written up right, it will be a good thing, too. That's why I'm talking to you. I want to 'wise you,' as Long Tom said, to the real situation."

"That's what I want, too," said Peanut.

"Well, the first thing to bear in mind is this," said the rector;—"the southern mountaineers are not living in the twentieth century, but the eighteenth. The rest of the country judges us by twentieth century standards. That's just as silly as judging Queen Anne's England by twentieth century standards. The Virginia, Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee mountains were settled before and just after the American Revolution by hardy, independent Scotch-Irish pioneers (they were really Scotch by blood, not Irish), who brought the rugged, free life of eighteenth century Scotland and North Ireland with 'em. From that day to this they have lived in these isolated mountain coves, without railroads, without telegraphs or telephones, in most cases without even cart tracks, leading to civilization. They have few towns, and those only little hamlets. The outside world hasn't touched them at all. They are still living exactly as the pioneers lived.

"Now, you've probably studied history, and you know that up in New England, where I reckon you came from ——"

"I did," said Peanut.

"Well, right in New England, not long after the Revolutionary War, there was an uprising called Shay's Rebellion ——"

"The last battle in Shay's Rebellion was fought in my town," said Peanut.

"Well, do you know what Shay's Rebellion was about?"

"Can't say I remember very clearly," Peanut laughed.

"It was about exactly the same thing that caused all the trouble three days ago here in Mineville," said the rector.

"I thought Shay's Rebellion was about taxes?" Peanut said.

"So it was," the other replied. "After the Revolution money was very scarce, and yet the taxes had to be very high, to meet the war debts. The New England farmers—your ancestors in Massachusetts, no doubt—were taxed at the rate of about two hundred dollars per family a year, and few of 'em ever saw that much money. So they got thrown into jail, till finally they rose up and fought.

"Well, conditions were just the same in the southern mountains, only the difference here is that those

conditions still prevail, in the twentieth century, though they were abolished in New England more than a hundred years ago. We are having little Shay's rebellions all the time. That's what the rest of the country doesn't understand."

"I'm afraid I don't," said Peanut.

The rector laughed. "You'll see for yourself tomorrow," he said. "It's this way—way back in these isolated farms, with no roads to market, the people have to live by barter almost exclusively, or by what they can grow or shoot. They can raise corn and potatoes, but they can't market 'em. They've never been taught to lumber scientifically. The only way they can get any cash is to convert their corn into whiskey. A bushel of corn converted into whiskey is worth two or three times as much as it is worth as grain, and it's reduced to a small bulk which can be carried over our trails and sold. Now, the Federal tax on a gallon of whiskey is two or three times as much as the price of the whiskey used to be. It's so high, in fact, that the mountaineer can't afford to pay it. The only people who can afford to pay it are the big distillers, who have their factories, and can make the stuff on a large and efficient scale. Mind you, I don't say the tax on whiskey isn't a good thing. I'd be glad to see it ~~so~~ high *nobody* could make the pizen. But the fact remains that if you take away the chance for the

mountain people to make whiskey, under present conditions you take away about their only source of revenue. It's the only means most of 'em have for getting any coin. That's why they rebel. Remember, they are living in eighteenth century, pioneer conditions. They haven't the twentieth century northerner's respect for the law. The law for the southern mountain man is his gun, and he can't see why he hasn't a right to do what he pleases with his own corn. Give them roads to market, give 'em practical instruction in scientific lumbering—that's the way to settle the blockade whiskey problem, or 'moonshining,' as you-uns call it. Do you begin to see what I'm driving at?"

"I think so," said Peanut. This wasn't the kind of story he had come for, but it began to seem to him even more interesting than a mere man hunt.

"I suppose, then, a lot of the mountaineers really sympathize with the Abington brothers?" he added.

"I'm afraid they do. Primitive people always worship brute courage—and it did take courage to do what the Abington boys did. I know those boys. It may sound strange, but they are fine fellows—six feet tall, devoted to their father and sisters, kind and friendly to all their mountain people. Do you know who is the only hero not a mountain man that we-uns sing about?"

"Jesse James!" laughed Peanut.

"That's it. How did you know?"

"Accident," Peanut answered. "I just happened to mention him in the hotel, and I saw it made a hit."

"Well, who was the hero their ancestors worshipped back in the British Isles two or three hundred years ago? Robin Hood—the brave, generous outlaw! Why, English poetry is full of admiring tales about Robin Hood and his merry men. Our mountain folk, as I've said, are still living in the eighteenth century. I don't doubt they'll make up a song about the Abington boys before long. They don't think those boys are any more criminals than your ancestors thought Shay was a criminal. Remember that when you write about them."

"You bet I will!" said Peanut. He was getting quite a different idea of the southern mountaineers.

"And remember," the rector added, "that it isn't exactly what you do that constitutes a real crime so much as what you do that your education and conscience tell you is wrong. The mountain folks believe it's a crime to steal, and you could leave a thousand dollars lying around loose in the Abington cabin for a week, and find every cent of it when you came back. Moreover, they'd shoot anybody else dead who tried to touch it. There isn't a thief or a beggar in our mountains."

After this lengthy talk, the rector told Peanut that he himself would take him in the morning out ■ far as he could drive, and then lead him to the head of a trail which would get him ultimately to the spot where the posse was last heard from.

"That's the best I can do for you, I'm afraid," he said.

"Well, that's an awful lot, and I'm certainly obliged to you more than I can say," the reporter gratefully declared.

"I want you to understand my people," the other man said. "Be ready for ■ soon start in the morning."

"I will," Peanut answered, shaking hands.

As he departed, he thought what an odd expression the rector had used—"a soon start," and jotted it down in his memory.

The hotel proprietor gave him a room when he got back—and Peanut spent the night on top of the bed, wrapped in his overcoat. He was too suspicious that the bedding hadn't been changed since the last occupant used it!

CHAPTER XXIII

PEANUT IS LED INTO THE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS

HE was up and ready for his "soon start" before six o'clock. So, apparently, was everybody else in Mineville, for the other guests were at breakfast as soon as Peanut. It was a sorry breakfast, too—coffee that looked like muddy rain water, soggy bread and fried eggs. The minister came to the hotel for him. Peanut had put on his khaki tramping clothes and stout boots, leaving his other clothes behind in his bag. He had provisions and a heavy sweater in his pack, and a note-book and pencil in his pocket. He also had his pedometer and compass. He climbed into the light buggy beside Mr. Walker, and they drove off, toward the rising sun.

Peanut looked all around him, at the tiny, straggling town they were leaving behind, at the unpainted cabins on the outskirts, at the open fields, the piles of mine-slack here and there, the rolling knobs of timber—but never a mountain did he see.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "I thought I was in the mountains. Last night the train came pulling up and up. Where are they?"

Mr. Walker laughed. "You'll see by and by," he answered. "We are on top of the Cumberland plateau now. It's a curious formation. Across the valley to the east, the ridge of the Great Smokies is a knife blade, in places over six thousand feet above sea level. But here in the Tennessee Cumberlands the ridge is some miles across, and it's really an up-land table-land. You don't see how high you are till you get to the edge."

They drove on, entering the woods now—hard wood, almost exclusively. Peanut looked in vain for the northern pine and hemlock of his native forests. He noticed that in a great many places the forest floor had been freshly burned over, and that there were no little trees coming up.

"That? Oh, that's our southern mountain way of getting early grass for the cattle. We have so few cleared pastures that the cattle have to feed in the woods," said the rector, in reply to his question.

"But it kills off all the little trees," said Peanut. "It's a terrible waste. Where's the new forest to come from?"

"I told you our mountain people don't know how to harvest their forests," the minister said. "Now you see. Forestry schools and roads are what the government ought to send us, instead of revenue officers with guns."

They came presently to a little clearing in the

woods, and Peanut uttered an exclamation of delight.

"I never saw anything so picturesque in my life!" he cried.

Here in the clearing, surrounded by the great leafy forest of oaks and chestnuts, stood a small cabin. It had an outside stone chimney at one end, plastered up with clay, not mortar. There was a door in the centre, but no windows except a small one at the opposite end from the chimney. Around it was a rough, split rail snake fence, and behind and on either side great peach trees in pink bloom. The pink of the peaches over the gray, unpainted, untrimmed, irregular boards of the cabin, with three little barefoot children with golden curls standing in the dark opening of the door frame, made a fascinating and lovely picture.

"Hello, Lucy and Emmy and Tom!" the rector called.

The children grinned at him, but when they saw Peanut, a stranger, they suddenly scurried back into the cabin like chipmunks into a stone wall.

"That's where your friend Long Tom lives," said the rector. "Those are three of his seven children."

"But how does he make a living on that little place? Why, there wasn't enough clearing to grow a bushel of corn."

"Oh, Tom's well off. He's near enough to work

in the mines," said the rector, as he snapped his whip to frighten a pig which was lying in the middle of the road ahead.

At least he called it a road. In Massachusetts, Peanut reflected, it wouldn't even have been considered good enough for a lumber trail. It was nothing but a narrow cleared strip through the forest, with all the roots left in it, and the stumps, too, sawed off at ground level. Between roots and stumps were deep mud holes, and one minute one side of the buggy would go bumping down, the next minute the other side, till it seemed to Peanut the axles would surely snap.

"Can't you imagine how profitable it would be hauling your crops twenty miles to the railroad over this?" Mr. Walker laughed, as Peanut, on a particularly sudden lurch, landed in his lap.

"You'd spill 'em all in the first mile," said Peanut.

They went on by this unspeakable cart track through the woods for several miles, now and then, at wide intervals, coming on other cabins, all of which looked much like the first one, and all with numerous children about the door.

Finally the track stopped in a little depression, where there was a solitary old gray cabin close to the crystal-clear brook which ran through the hollow.

"This is Thumping Dick Hollow," said the rector.

"It's what?"

"Thumping Dick Hollow. Don't you like the name?"

"Sure, it's a grand name. But why?"

"A hundred years ago a man named Dick lived here," said the rector, "and he invented an ingenious labor-saving device to pound his corn. He mounted a hollow log like a seesaw over the rapids in the brook, with the heavier end up-stream, so that the lower end was some feet above the water. Then, near the lower end, he fastened a pestle on a rod, and under it placed his mortar, with the corn in it. The water flowed into the hollowed log and ran down it till the lower end was heavy enough to tip down. Then the pestle hit the corn in the mortar, while the water ran out and the log tipped back. Then it would fill again, tip down and give another pound, and so on, day and night. All Dick had to do was to empty the mortar now and then and put in fresh corn. Of course, the thing made a thump every time it tipped down, so the place was called Thumping Dick Hollow. What do you reckon the name of the creek is?"

"Give it up," said Peanut.

"Fiery Gizzard Creek," laughed the rector. "But don't ask me why, because nobody seems to know."

The rector now hitched his mare to a tree, just as a man and a woman came to the door of the cabin. He hailed them with a "Howdy," and they seemed

delighted to see him, hurrying across Fiery Gizzard Creek on stepping stones.

It seemed to Peanut that he asked after every individual member of their family, and they after every member of his, before he introduced Peanut to them.

"My friend here has got a job on his hands," said he, addressing the man. "He is a newspaper writer from New York and his paper has sent him down to follow up that posse and see what they do. Have you any idea, Silas, where they are?"

Both the man and woman stared at Peanut, and he could feel that they would have been suspicious and probably quite mum if he hadn't been with their beloved "preacher." They were a quaint pair as they stood by the brook. The man wore a pair of ragged, patched, ill-fitting "store" trousers, a worn white shirt (though it was clean), with no collar, and he carried his inevitable black slouch hat in his hand. He was tall, raw-boned, thin, with a bushy reddish beard. The woman had on a calico dress exactly like every other dress Peanut had seen that morning, long sleeves, high neck, and plain as a pikestaff. Her hair was parted in the middle, combed straight down, and pulled hard into a knot behind, and her face was wrinkled. She, too, was tall, angular and raw-boned.

The man spoke, after a moment of deliberation.

"I ain't shore whar hit is, thet posse," he said.

"I reckon hit be split up some. Last I heard, the big drive was goin' up Milk Sick Cove to-day."

"They haven't caught the boys yet, have they?" Mr. Walker asked.

"Not so fur as we-uns hev heard. I reckon they-uns 'll be bodaciously tired out fur they do, too!"

"I reckon they will. But you know, Silas, Uncle Sam's men mean business."

"Humph!" said Silas.

"Humph!" said his wife, like an echo.

"But what's the best way for my friend to get to Milk Sick Cove?" asked the rector. "That's fifteen miles off, isn't it?"

"Bout fifteen mile. Thar's three ways o' gettin' thar, but only one easy one. He can clim' down an almighty steep place and go through Rip-Shin Cove—that's the shortest. He can go on out to Devil's Pulpit Point, clim' down thar and work through Pizen Gulch, *or* he can take the long trail down through Abington Cove and fotch up by a clear trail to whar the trail goes up Milk Sick. T'other two ways, he won't hev no coat when he gets thar, an' no more breeches than the law demands, let alone decency."

"That's a pleasant prospect. I guess it's me for Abington Cove," said Peanut. "I don't like the sound of the others—Rip-Shin Cove—Pizen Gulch!"

"If I wore a stranger, I wouldn't wanter make no

noises like a United States marshal while I wore passin' old man Abington's place," said Silas, grimly.

"Nonsense, Silas," said the rector. "Big John Abington never harmed a stranger in his life, you know that. He's given many a one a meal, though, and put 'em up for the night. This lad can't go down through Rip-Shin or Pizen Gulch. He'd lose his way in no time. I don't believe there's even a trail down Rip-Shin."

"Thar's an old bear run," said the man, laconically.

"Yes, and nobody but you and Bert Abington could find it. He'll have to go by the Abington trail."

But though he spoke with seeming lightness, Peanut could see that the rector was very grave. He declined the invitation to come into the cabin, and led Peanut away along a foot-path through the woods.

"Why do they call it Milk Sick Cove?" Peanut asked. "I can understand the Rip-Shin."

"Because there are certain places in our mountains where the cows get something which poisons them and their milk. It's only in thick, dark woods, where they sometimes wander. I presume it's a fungus of some sort. Anyhow, it disappears when the woods are cleared. Abraham Lincoln's mother died from drinking 'sick milk.' Milk Sick Cove is a lonely, wild place. I was never there but once."

If you don't find your posse at the entrance, keep your compass working, and be sure you have matches and food."

"I suppose I can always follow water back to some cabin, sooner or later?"

"Yes, but if you get off the trail in Milk Sick, it'll be later, because of the laurel and rhododendron and briars. Better not lose the trail."

The foot-path was now taking them toward what seemed to be a clearing, for Peanut saw light through the trees ahead. A moment later they emerged suddenly from the woods, and the reporter gave a gasp.

"There, now do you see why we call this a mountain country?" asked the rector, with a smile.

Peanut found himself standing on a ledge of rock which dropped off four or five hundred feet into a deep, heavily wooded ravine. The stream beside the path leapt over this rock in a series of tumbling, silvery cascades, and disappeared into the forest gloom below. From the point where he stood he could look directly down the length of the ravine, which seemed to grow wider and wider, and also deeper, till in the far distance rose up the hazy blue walls of other mountains. To right and left the rocky cliff extended along in a series of crags and "pulpits," with no apparent path down into the ravine.

"This is the head of Abington's Cove," said the rector. "You see now why we call them coves. They are like an arm of the sea coming into the land. Milk Sick Cove runs up into those blue mountains you see down there at the far end."

"But how do I get down? Sit on the waterfall and coast?" asked Peanut.

"Not quite," the other laughed. "I'll show you."

He now led the way along the top of the left-hand cliff for half a mile, till it ended in a sharp point, like the bow of a ship—a great bow five hundred feet high.

"Now, here on your right is Abington's Cove," said the rector. "And there on the left you now see Rip-Shin Cove."

Peanut looked down to the left into a small cove, very deep and wild, and saw that the slope into it was one solid mass of laurel and rhododendron, so thick that it would take an hour to go a mile, without a path, and that the head wall was almost a precipice for the last hundred feet.

"Me for Abington's!" he exclaimed.

"Well, here's the path to Abington's." The rector pointed to a dim trail that disappeared over the nose of the point. "It's steep, but clear. Now I'm going to give you a note to 'Big John' Abington. You'll find his cabin four miles down the creek. If you hear a girl scream at any time, stop in your tracks,

and call out to her that you are bringing a note from me. Then give her the note. Don't under any circumstances try to go ahead after she screams until she's come to you and taken the note. You may get a bullet if you do, I'm sorry to say. I wish I could go on with you. Also, if Big John invites you in to dinner, don't refuse him. You ought to get there just about dinner time. Good-bye, and good luck."

"Good-bye," said Peanut. "I won't forget what you've done for me."

He made sure his pack was fast, shook hands with his friend, swung over the brow of the point and started down a precipitous trail.

It was a steep trail, steeper even than the head wall of Tuckerman's Ravine on Mount Washington, but unlike the trails in the White Mountains it was not over bare rock. Except at the very top of the cliffs, the rocks here in the southern mountains scarcely show at all. Everything is covered with verdure. Trees cling to every cranny, moss, ferns and wild flowers cover every spot. As he descended rapidly, Peanut began to notice the wild flowers. On top of the plateau they had not yet begun to blossom in abundance, but down in the sheltered cove he actually trod on bloodroot as big as butter plates, on the umbrella leaves of May apples, on violets and lovely ferns. Through the leafy green of the rich

forest he saw in clearings the peach-blossom red of Judas trees. The forest trees themselves fascinated him, they were so tall and straight and splendid—all hardwoods, some gums and chestnuts rising sixty or seventy feet before they threw a branch.

“What lumber!” he thought. “If only the mountain people knew how to harvest it scientifically, they could be well off forever, and not need to make another drop of moonshine.”

Then he thought of the nearest railroad, ten or twelve miles back at Mineville, with the head wall of the cove and the awful road between.

“I guess the lumber will stay here till there are some roads built in from the lower ends of the coves,” he added to himself.

The trail he was following was a foot-path, and none too clear. If he had not been used to woodcraft he would have had some difficulties.

“Score one more for the Boy Scouts,” he reflected, as he came to a particularly blind place, and picked up the trail again by looking for signs of footprints on the rotten wood which lay on the forest floor.

The trail went steadily down-hill, though more gradually now that he had reached the floor of the cove. Off to the right he could hear Fiery Gizzard Creek now and then, as it rushed over a fall, but he could seldom see it, so thick was the undergrowth. He was making good time, and in an hour he sud-

denly saw the light of a clearing ahead, being further warned of the presence of habitation by a lean hog which ran off into the woods across his path.

As he stepped out into this clearing, and saw in front of him an open space of several acres, with the creek flowing through it and a large gray cabin and a log barn, surrounded by the inevitable peach trees and rail fence, in the centre, he was suddenly startled by the shrill, piercing scream of a girl, close to him. He had not seen her at first glance, for she had been sitting under a bush. She rose now and stood directly in his path, screaming twice more.

Peanut stopped dead in his tracks, too astonished at first to say a word. She was a tall, slender girl, he judged about nineteen, though probably she was really younger. She wore the inevitable calico dress, but she was bareheaded and barefooted. She stared at Peanut with large, brown, hostile eyes.

He smiled back at her now as pleasantly as he could, and said, "I have a note for Mr. Abington from the Reverend Mr. Walker."

He held out the note.

"Put it on that stump," said the girl, pointing to a stump close beside him.

Peanut did so, and stepped back. The girl came forward and snatched up the note, reading it slowly herself.

"All right," she said presently, "come along."

She led the way with long, rapid strides toward the cabin, and as they approached Peanut saw a huge man, with an iron-gray beard, lumber up from a chair in front of the door, remove the percussion cap from a very long muzzle-loading gun, lay the gun against the house, and stand ready to greet them.

"Paw," said the girl, "this feller has a letter from the preacher."

The big man put out his huge hand, and shook Peanut's.

"Any friend o' the preacher's is welcome hyur," he said. "What mought your name be, stranger?"

Peanut told him.

"Set down, set down," he said beckoning toward the chair. But Peanut saw that he was almost crippled in one leg, evidently with rheumatism, and refused.

"No, that's your chair," he said.

"Git another, Lucy," the old man ordered.

"Let me!" said Peanut, springing forward.

Both the girl and her father looked at him in astonishment.

"No!" said the old man. "It's the gal's place to serve a stranger."

She returned from the cabin with a second chair, a very old, rough, hand-made piece of furniture, and Peanut sat down, while the old man, with elaborate and courteous apologies, listened to a whispered

reading of the rector's note. It was evident he couldn't read himself.

He turned to Peanut again. "The preacher tells me you be sent hyur to follow the critters that are tryin' to ketch my boys," he said, in what struck Peanut as a curiously matter-of-fact tone for a man whose sons were being pursued for murder, and one of whom had been killed. "He 'lows you-uns might be fairer in what you write if you saw the boys' pop. Them boys is good boys, Mr. Morrison. No man never had none better'n them. We-uns are pore folks. You clim' down thet trail jest now, an' I reckon you-uns saw whar we'd hev to tote our corn. I 'low we-uns got a right to get *something* out o' what we grow—it's ours, ain't it? The revenuers fit my boys, an' my boys jest fit back, like true Abingtons."

"Everybody all over the country is saying how brave they are," said Peanut.

"They be Abingtons," the old man repeated, with pride.

He leaned back in his chair and grasped his gun, an old rifle as long as Hawk Eye's in "The Last of the Mohicans."

"Thet thar gun wore my pop's before me," said he, tapping the stock. "See them little notches? Every one o' them wore something as big as a bear. Some panthers, too, in my pop's day. Some two

legged varmints, too. Got so full o' notches now they isn't no more room. We pretty nigh kept this cove fur Abingtons to do what they please in, fur a hundred years."

As Peanut looked at the old man, sitting by his rude cabin in this forest cove, shut in by precipitous mountain walls and reached only by one narrow foot track, he realized vividly how little modern civilization had touched him. He realized the truth of the rector's words—that the mountain people are still living the life of the wilderness pioneers of the eighteenth century. No power on earth could make this man realize that his sons had committed a crime. They were fighting for their rights. And the sons had been brought up in the same rough creed.

Again Peanut thought of the rector's words—"Come to these people with roads and schools, not guns."

Presently Big John, with a groan, heaved his rheumatic form up again, saying, "I'll ax the woman gin she can git ye a bite along with we-uns. No stranger goes hungry past Big John Abington's."

Peanut was going to demur, but he remembered the rector's warning.

Not long after he was introduced to the wife of one of the sons, and invited in to the meal, which was served in a room in the cabin evidently used both as kitchen and dining-room in winter, though

in summer a good deal of the cooking was done outside, in a big iron pot over a fire pit. As he entered the cabin, Peanut glanced into the other rooms, and saw that there were two or three cot beds in every one of them. The family at dinner consisted of Big John himself, the son's wife and two little grandchildren, a girl and a boy, about eight or ten years old. The girl who had screamed had evidently gone back to her post, and from the talk Peanut gathered that there was another daughter, probably on post down the trail.

The interior of the cabin was barer than any house Peanut had ever seen. Between the half-squared logs which made the walls great chinks let in light, for they were poorly caulked with clay. The bare oak floors, too, of rough boards, polished only by a hundred years of mopping and sweeping, had chinks between them. There were no pictures on the rough walls, no table-cloth on the table, and hardly enough coarse china dishes to go around. There were no forks, only steel knives and spoons, to eat with. But nobody made any apologies. The dinner consisted of fried bacon, dandelion greens stewed in a huge dish, fried potatoes and corn bread. There was no butter, and no sugar for the coffee, which Peanut heroically drank though it didn't taste like any coffee he was acquainted with.

"What a way to live!" he thought, as the little

girl had to get up from the table twice to drive out a pig which came grunting in at the wide-open door.

But everybody was very courteous to him, and the father of the family asked him many questions about New York, rather from politeness, Peanut felt, than from any real interest, and finally gave him directions how to find the trail up Milk Sick.

When he was about to depart, Peanut wondered if he ought to offer to pay for his dinner. Finally he decided that these people were so very poor that he certainly ought to. He made the suggestion, rather shamefacedly, and the old man drew himself up.

"Stranger," he said, "nobody never paid nothing fur a meal at my house yet, and I reckon we-uns ain't so pore as it's time to begin now."

He spoke with great dignity, and Peanut blushed. Nevertheless, as he was going, he slipped half a dollar into the hand of the little girl.

"That's not pay," he said. "It's a present so she can get a ribbon or something to remember me by."

The child, overcome with astonishment at having money of her own, stared open-mouthed, as Peanut departed down the trail.

He saw no sign of the other daughter as he left the clearing, but he heard a rustle off through the shrubbery, and knew that she was watching.

On this lower side of the cabin the trail was poorer than above. Evidently the Abingtons went

for market up the slope to Mineville—a fifteen mile walk each way! Peanut was now going into the wild heart of the cove country, leaving the last traces of civilization behind him.

He had about ten or eleven miles to go before he reached the mouth of Milk Sick Cove, and all the way by foot-path or dim cart track. He went four or five miles by foot-path, through the magnificent timber of the cove bottom, before he came to another clearing. From that cabin on, the trail grew a little plainer, and he picked up cabins, or perhaps only clearings suggesting cabins near by, every mile or two. At last he came to the "crossroads" Big John Abington had described to him—which, in reality, was nothing but the crossing of two dim cart tracks in the woods, and here he turned to the left, toward the mouth of Milk Sick.

The new trail led him, after a mile or so, to the smallest, poorest cabin he had seen yet. Behind it was a deep, wild cleft into the mountain walls which he knew must be Milk Sick Cove. Beyond the top of the divide at the head of Milk Sick the rector had told him the mountains dropped down into the plains, yet this, the last cove, was the wildest of all.

There wasn't a soul about the cabin except a small girl of ten or eleven, with three still smaller boys and a baby girl—the whole lot of them lined up staring at Peanut as he drew near.

"Is that Milk Sick Cove?" he asked the eldest girl, pointing up the ravine.

She nodded her head slowly.

"Where does the trail up it begin?"

"Thar," she answered, pointing to the end of the clearing behind the cabin.

"Have you seen a crowd of men go by up that way lately?"

The girl shook her head slowly, not saying a word. But the youngest boy suddenly piped up—"My pop went after 'em yes'day. They hain't come back yet. My pop said they-all was on a man hunt ——"

His elder sister suddenly slapped his mouth, holding her hand over it, but Peanut had his information, and he hurried through the clearing and looked about for the trail up Milk Sick.

At first he could see no path at all, but presently he picked it up, and after squeezing through the blackberry hedge he could follow, with some difficulty, an evidently little used foot-path up toward the dark shadows of the cove. It was getting late in the day now, and though he was tired and hot and his pack had begun to make his shoulders ache, he hurried as fast as he could, in the hope of picking up some sign of the posse, or reaching the head of the cove, before darkness caught him.

But he reckoned without a knowledge of the

country. In the first place, it was much farther than it looked to the head wall of the cove, and in the second place this path was not a traveled way, like the others he had been on, but evidently merely an old hunters' trail, badly overgrown with briars and the omnipresent laurel. Going was very slow and heavy, and though he pushed on with all his strength, darkness caught him in the shadow of the deep woods unaware, and he suddenly found that he had lost the track altogether.

Then he did a foolish thing. Instead of camping where he was, and waiting till morning to pick up the trail again, he tried in what little light there was left to recapture it before he camped.

The task was vain. He crashed into innumerable laurel, he tore his hands and clothes on enormous blackberry thorns, and, after ten minutes, he realized that he was lost, so far as the trail was concerned.

For a moment his heart went down to his boots. Then he pulled himself together and said aloud :

■ Well, you idiot, you might as well camp where there's water, anyhow."

He stopped dead still and listened. At first he heard nothing but the whisper of the wind in the great trees. Then, softly, there came to his ears the tinkle of water flowing over stones. He followed the sound, stopping often to listen, tearing his clothes still more in the briars and laurel, stumbling over

fallen logs. But, after a hard tussle, he reached the brook, and was about to plunge down and drink.

"No!" he thought, checking himself. "If the cows get poisoned in here, it may be from the water. I'll boil it first."

It was a difficult job in the darkness gathering enough dry dead wood for a fire, but he finally got one going, and put on his kettle to boil. He made himself bouillon and tea, and toasted some bacon, eating a frugal supper, hungry as he was, to conserve his provisions. Cold settled down quickly with the night in this mountain cove, and in spite of the fire, he put on his heavy sweater.

CHAPTER XXIV

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS SAYS "HANDS UP!"

AFTER he had eaten, and was cleaning his dishes, he was suddenly startled by what sounded distinctly like a step in the bed of the brook above—as if a person's foot had slipped as he was trying to walk on the stones. Peanut raised his head quickly and listened, his heart pounding. He distinctly heard a bush snap heavily, and he started to his feet.

At the same second a voice rang out of the blackness close to him :

"Put up your hands !

Peanut, who was unarmed save for his hatchet, and that lay by the fire, put up his hands. At the same time he faced the voice, and saw by the glow of the fire the glitter of a rifle barrel thrust out of the bushes toward him.

"I'm alone and unarmed," Peanut said, in as steady a voice as he could command. "I've lost the trail, and I'm camping here for the night."

"Who be you?" the voice demanded.

"I'm a reporter from the New York *Transcript*,"

Peanut replied. "I came down from Mineville to-day. The Reverend Mr. Walker gave me a letter to Big John Abington, and I stopped there for dinner."

He added this last bit of information on a chance. Immediately he heard a whisper, and realized there were more than one behind the screen of bushes.

"Who set at table at Big John's?" the voice demanded again.

"He and his son's wife and two grandchildren, a girl and a boy," Peanut answered. "His daughter Lucy—he called her that, she read my letter to him—and another daughter I didn't see were out by the path at either end of the clearing. They didn't come in to dinner."

He heard whispers again, and then two figures crashed out of the black bushes into the firelight. They were both young men, six feet tall, armed with modern rifles, but their clothes were in rags and they looked dragged and weary, their high cheek bones, over which the skin was tightly drawn, casting shadows in the red fire glow up their foreheads.

One of them strode quickly to Peanut and slapped him over thoroughly, to make sure he had no pistol. He nodded to his companion, and then said, politely enough but in a way that amounted to a command :

"Give us something to eat, if you've got it."

Peanut obeyed without parley. He knew in-

stinctively who these two men were. He knew they were the Abington brothers. His knees were trembling, but it was not with terror. Somehow, he had no fear that they would harm him. It was with excitement that instead of being with the pursuing posse, he was actually with the men being pursued, and if they talked at all to him, it would be an interview with the fugitives!

"Talk about your picturesque human interest yarns!" he thought.

"I've not got much," he said aloud. "But what I have you're welcome to. I guess you're hungrier than I am."

"Reckon we be," said the two, laconically.

They sat down, but carefully placed themselves out of the firelight, shielded by a bush, and Peanut could feel that they kept their eyes and ears wide open.

First he made them a cup of hot bouillon apiece, and then he toasted them bacon on some of his precious supply of hard crackers, and made them tea. He concealed the fact that he had sweet chocolate in his pack, for their inroads on his provisions meant two less meals for himself, and he might need his chocolate. To be sure, he had two cans of emergency rations, but they were a last resort.

The two men ate the food like famished animals, and started to drink the tea.

One of them spit out the first mouthful. "What's this stuff?" he demanded.

"Tea," said Peanut. "It's good tea, too."

"It's the untastiest ever I drunk," the man declared. "Here, you-uns drink some fust!"

Peanut laughed, took a long drink from the cup and then passed it back.

The men seemed satisfied. "Wall, it's hot," they said.

"Sorry you don't like it," Peanut remarked. "It's all I have to offer you. *I* don't like the coffee you people here in the mountains drink, for that matter."

The shot seemed to penetrate. "Stranger, it shore be unhandsome of us-uns to complain," one of the men said. "But we-uns are just naturally suspicious sometimes. It ain't usual to find a stranger in the middle o' Milk Sick at this time o' night."

Peanut was debating with himself what he had better do. Finally he decided that complete frankness would be the wisest thing.

"I told you who I am," he answered. "Here's my reporter's card."

He passed his card over to one of the men, who held his hand into the firelight, keeping his face in shadow, and read it.

"I was sent down here to follow up the posse

that's chasing the Abington brothers and describe what happens for my paper. They told me in Mineville the posse went up Milk Sick yesterday, and Mr. Walker took me to the head wall of Abington's Cove this morning, and gave me a note to Big John Abington, who made me have dinner with him, I guess partly because I had that letter, and partly because he's such a fine, generous, hospitable man. Then I came on and tried to follow the trail up Milk Sick, and got off it when dark came, and worked down here to water by the sound. In the morning, if I can find the trail again, I'm going to push on up and try to catch the posse. That's my job. That's on the level."

Peanut smiled his most frank and winning smile at the two figures he could dimly see beyond the firelight. "Is it going to be tit for tat?" he asked.

"We-uns be mountain folk, and this be our land," one of them answered. "You-uns be a furriner. We jest ax *you* to explain."

Peanut thought again, quickly. Then he said, "Well, that's your right, I guess. But I'll tell you this—if I do meet up with the posse in the morning, I'll have forgotten all about seeing anybody down here to-night. I didn't meet a soul in Milk Sick. I'd like to shake hands with you on that."

Two hands came slowly out from the shadow of the bush, and Peanut shook them.

"Stranger," said one of the men, "you-uns be from the North. I can tell that. But you talk square to me. How wore Big John's grandchildren when you come by thar?"

"They were fine," said Peanut.

He felt a just perceptible tremor go through the fingers grasping his.

"You don't need fur to clim' Milk Sick come mornin' ter meet up with no posse. You set an' wait out on the trail, an' you'll hear 'em comin'. Good-night, stranger."

"Good-night," said Peanut. "And good luck," he added.

He heard the two men slip into the brook, and go on down, with astonishing quickness in the pitch dark. He was left alone with his fire, in the midst of the lonely forest.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN HUNT IN FULL CRY

PEANUT tried to sleep, but he succeeded little that night. In spite of his sweater he was bitterly cold, and he had to keep the fire going all night. He wasn't hardened up to sleeping out-of-doors any more, nor was there anything to make a soft bed out of like the hemlock boughs of the northern woods.

He roused from a cat-nap before sunup, and cooked himself a scanty breakfast—his last two pieces of bacon, a little scrambled egg from egg powder, and tea. He tried a bath in the brook, but the water was too icy cold, so, as soon as it was light, he worked back toward where he thought the path ought to be, found it at last, and was debating whether to go up it or to wait, as the brothers had told him to, when far above him up the cove he heard the deep bay of a hound, almost like a bass trumpet blast.

"They've got bloodhounds!" he exclaimed.
"That's why the men took the brook!"

He stood where he was and waited. Presently the occasional baying, which had been coming nearer,

ceased, and instead Peanut heard yips from the dogs, as if they had lost the scent.

"That's where the Abingtons took to the water," he reflected.

He had not waited half an hour when at last he heard the posse coming, some evidently in the path, some, with the dogs, down the bed of the brook. He got into as open a space as he could, so that he could be plainly seen, and waited.

Two guns went up as the leaders spied him, but Peanut waved his handkerchief, and as soon as the United States marshal in command arrived close to him he explained who he was, and showed his reporter's card.

"Well, fall in behind, and keep up if you can," the marshal said. "We had two reporters with us, but they couldn't stand the pace. We've got a hot trail at last. Those cusses have led us an awful chase—they run like bears through anything. They tried to break over the divide above, and get across the plain into Carolina, but our officers below headed 'em, and they had to turn back. Slipped right past us last night, in the dark, but we got some dogs at last, and they picked up the fresh trail this morning. The cusses have to come out of that brook some time."

Just then there came a series of deep-mouthed bays.

"They've found my fire!" Peanut thought.

Men were shouting to the marshal, and he went down to the brook.

"Built a fire, eh?" he said. "They've got a nerve! Well, the dogs show they went on down the stream. Keep the dogs on the bank."

He never asked Peanut where *he* had spent the night, and Peanut was thankful for it. He didn't like the idea of lying, and yet when he saw this great crowd of men and dogs hunting down two half-starved men, who, at heart, were not really criminals, for they knew no better than to do what they had done, he wouldn't have betrayed them even if he hadn't given his promise. He hadn't felt so keenly as now, even when talking with the rector or Big John, that it wasn't bloodhounds and guns but roads and schools that Uncle Sam ought to chase the mountaineers with.

The hunt now developed fast. At the bottom of Milk Sick the brook flowed into a larger, deeper stream, too deep and swift to wade. The brothers must have swum it, and into the icy water plunged the pursuing posse, with Peanut and the dogs, and on the farther side the dogs were set to pick up the scent again. They hunted for some time, up-stream and down, getting it at last some distance away. The brothers must have swum down-stream a hundred yards.

Then the hunt was on again, leading through

briars and rhododendron and laurel, across a clearing, through deep woods, up a brook where once more the dogs were thrown off the scent, and finally into the "laurel hell" of Rip-Shin Cove.

Here even the dogs had to go slow. There was literally no way through in places unless you crawled on your stomach under the matted bushes, their stems strong as steel. But the hounds had a trail which was fresh, and they stuck to it. The posse was strung out behind them, Peanut keeping near the rear not so much from choice as because he couldn't keep up with these marshals and revenue officers who were used to this kind of work. His coat was torn, his trousers were almost shredded into ribbons below his knees, and his face, hands and shins were covered with bloody scratches.

"Oh, if I'd only had sense enough to wear leather puttees!" he thought.

"I wish my shins grew on the back side of my legs, then I couldn't scratch 'em so much," he heard one man say.

The trail led up and up, steeper and steeper, till finally, in an opening, Peanut saw ahead of and above him the rocky cliff of the head wall. At the same instant he saw three tongues of flame spit from the trees up there, and then heard the crack of the rifles.

"We've got 'em pocketed, boys!" cried some

near him. "The guard on top ~~are~~ firing at 'em!"

There were two answering cracks from the thicket just below the head wall, and instantly the marshal began to give commands. The posse spread out like a fan, the dogs were held in leash, and cautiously, with each man so close to the next that he could see anybody trying to slip through between, all rifles ready for instant action, the fan began to close in on the spot where the two shots came from, the ends of it working in on each side to reach the cliff wall and cut off side escape.

"Get back, and keep low!" ~~some~~ one said to Peanut. "The lead 'll fly here in a minute."

Peanut, in the rear of the fan, worked up behind, from tree to tree, keeping himself covered. He was tingling with excitement, and he felt faint, too, faint with the thought of men firing at each other with rifles, shooting each other down. He wanted suddenly to turn and run. He didn't want to witness the finish.

But he was a reporter on a job, and he stuck to his post.

The rifles cracked again, and Peanut heard a bullet go zinging and tearing through the foliage close to him. Then the men in the human fan began firing. They were on their bellies now, crawling forward through the tangle, or springing,

crouched, from tree to tree. Peanut worked up by the same tactics behind them, till he could see where the rifle spits were coming from.

The two fugitives, evidently surprised by the unexpected guard on top of the head wall, had been prevented from climbing over. If they had once got over, Peanut realized, they would have secured a big start again, for the dogs couldn't climb the cliff. They had then taken refuge under an overhanging rock from the rifles above, and behind a barricade of stones had turned to face their pursuers. Even then, in all the excitement, Peanut wondered why they hadn't been able to get up the cliff the night before, for they had ~~an~~ eight hour start.

The guns were cracking now like a battle. Splinters of bark flew from the trees, one of the posse ~~was~~ wounded in the hand, another had his hat shot off, another got ~~a~~ bullet in the shoulder. They were fighting in at a range of two hundred yards, and it was dangerous business against mountain marksmanship.

Then the bark of one of the fugitives' guns ceased. Peanut realized it, for it had ~~a~~ different sound from the other rifle.

"He's wounded—or killed," he said aloud. "Poor kids back in the cabin!"

Ten minutes later the other gun stopped firing,

and over the stone rampart fluttered a bit of white cloth. The posse sprang up and rushed to the place.

The white flag was a piece of one fugitive's shirt. He was unwounded, but beside him lay his brother, with the blood streaming from a hole in his wrist.

Peanut saw it, for he had closed in with the posse.

"Quick!" he cried; "he's severed an artery and he's bleeding to death! Get me a strong stick!"

"Do you think I'd have given in if it wa'n't to save his life?" said the other brother.

Somebody cut a stick while the marshal was handcuffing the unwounded fugitive, and Peanut, with his handkerchief, put into practice his Boy Scout first aid training, and adjusted a tourniquet to stop the flow of blood.

Then he looked at the pale, tattered figure, lying in a faint, his blood making a pool beside him. "See, his ankle!" Peanut said.

The rest looked. It was swollen to three times its normal size, and badly discolored.

"What a sprain!" the marshal exclaimed. "Was that the reason you didn't get him up over the cliff last night, Little John?"

The handcuffed man sullenly nodded his head. "You'd never got us if he hadn't slipped last night," he said defiantly.

"Oh, yes, we would. After we got these dogs

yesterday over the divide we had you. You know it, too. Why didn't you leave Tom at Crawford's cabin, and make a getaway yourself?"

"Abingtons don't abandon their blood kin!" said the captive, proudly. "You-uns can take us to court now. I'm bodaciously hungry."

The men on top of the cliff, who, Peanut learned, had been signaled to by a fire on top of the divide the night before and hence were on the watch at the head of every cove, now came down and helped get the wounded man up. The dogs had to be led back down the cove. It was all the party could do, with ropes made by tying their coats together, to get the fainting prisoner up the cliff. Besides, the two wounded pursuers had to be helped. Once on top, a rough stretcher was improvised, and the injured prisoner hurried as fast as possible to the nearest cabin, where a horse and cart were requisitioned, and all haste made for Mineville, with the three wounded men bumping cruelly on the bottom.

Peanut followed on foot with the bulk of the posse. It was now mid afternoon, and he had had nothing to eat since his scanty breakfast, and before the ten mile walk was over he had a stitch in his side and nearly dropped from weariness.

But the first thing he did when he got to the town was to send a wire to his paper, announcing the capture, and telling, in a few paragraphs, the dra-

matic features of the battle on the wild cliff at the head of Rip-Shin Cove.

There was no train down the mountain to the main line that night, except a freight which left at seven o'clock. Peanut washed off the blood from his myriad scratches, changed into his good clothes, got something to eat at the hotel, and before departing made a call on Mr. Walker, to whom he narrated what had happened, and told him how the Abingtons had surprised him at his camp-fire, and he had promised not to give them away.

"I don't know whether I did right or wrong," he said. "But I couldn't help it. It wasn't my job to catch 'em, anyhow, only to watch the posse do it. But when you see 'em—I suppose you will, as their pastor—I wish you'd tell them that I was on the level, that I kept my word. They could have winged me easy last night, or taken all my coin and my watch and my food, and everything. But they didn't. I see what you mean now—about their not being really criminals. Their fight with the law is what they've been brought up to believe is right and brave."

"I'll tell them," said the rector. "And the secret shall never go beyond us four, unless you tell it."

Peanut once more said good-bye, and a few minutes later he was riding down the mountain in the caboose of a freight train. He had a wait of two

hours in a dim station on the main line, and at midnight boarded the New York sleeper. As he entered the sleeping car, he was met by an obsequious porter, and suddenly recalled that he had not seen a single colored man or woman in the mountains.

The porter took his bag and made up a berth; the conductor, in brass buttons, punched his ticket; in the dressing-room sat a drummer, who hadn't yet got sleepy enough to retire, reading a two-day-old New York paper. Peanut felt almost as if the last few days had been a dream, as if he had stepped back again out of the eighteenth century into the modern world of civilization, out of the dream into reality again.

CHAPTER XXVI

PEANUT REALIZES THE POWER OF THE PRESS

HE slept like a log in his berth that night, and once more woke up as the train was passing through the Virginia mountains. But this time it was going north, and mile by mile it came down into wider valleys, with larger towns and more extensive farms and plantations. After breakfast he began to shape up his story, making notes of all he had heard and seen.

He reached New York at evening, and stopped at the office, where he worked till one o'clock on his story. The next morning he rose early and worked all that day, too. He wanted to write a story which should be something more than an exciting description of a man hunt. He wanted it also to be a picture of the life of the mountain people, which should make his readers see why they needed roads and schools—but roads more than anything; to show his readers how they were really living back in the eighteenth century.

It wasn't easy to write a story like this. To describe the hunt was easy enough, but to bring in all the rest was hard. He wrote and rewrote some

paragraphs half a dozen times, and that day he worked twelve hours steadily on his story. Finally he felt it was as good as he could make it, though he knew it wasn't as good as it ought to be. He had worked in his interviews with the rector, he had described Big John and his cabin and his gun, he had told about the meal, about the inside of the cabin, the screaming girl as a sentinel. He had described as vividly as he knew how the rough trails by which the mountain people have to travel on foot, and the utter impossibility of getting any produce to market that has to be carried in bulk. Of course, he had described the hunt, and his dramatic meeting with the fugitives, starting off his story at the very beginning, however, with a description of his arrival at the Mineville hotel and the suspicions he had aroused.

When he described the meeting by the brook he grinned. "If the marshal reads this," he reflected, "he'll know who built that fire!"

The next morning he turned the story in to the Sunday editor, and at one o'clock reported back on his regular job. He was assigned to help the baseball man cover the opening game at the Polo grounds.

"Some change from the Tennessee Mountains," he laughed. "Anyhow, it won't tear my clothes to pieces."

The following Sunday his story appeared. It oc-

cupied an entire page of the paper, illustrated with some pictures Peanut had borrowed from the rector of cabins and mountain folk. It was headed, "A Man Hunt in the Southern Mountains," and led the Sunday magazine section.

Tom read it at breakfast, and declared it was "great."

At the office, when Peanut arrived, everybody had read it, and he was in for a session of back slappings, congratulations and questions.

The next day the managing editor raised his pay ten dollars a week and the Sunday editor told him the editor of a popular monthly magazine wanted to see him about writing an article on the southern mountaineers.

But that wasn't to be the end. The following day Mr. Nichols was talking with a tall, distinguished looking man when he arrived, and after the assignment book was out, called Peanut over and introduced him. Peanut recognized the name as that of a man famous for his wealth and philanthropy.

"Here's the lad who wrote the story," Mr. Nichols said. "This is Mr. Ezra Perkins, Morrison."

The other man shook hands with the embarrassed reporter and to his amazement asked him to call at his office.

"You may go this afternoon," the city editor said. "I haven't given you an assignment."

The philanthropist's office was on Wall Street. Peanut was ushered through the banking rooms of the firm, and shown to the private office, where Mr. Perkins received him pleasantly, asked him to sit down, and then called in a stenographer, to take notes. It was the reporter who was being interviewed this time.

The older man's questions were many, and all of them were pertinent. Peanut did his best to answer them accurately and fully. What seemed to interest Mr. Perkins most, however, was the trick of burning off the dead leaves on the forest floor every spring, to get early fodder for the cattle.

"You are quite sure they do this?" he demanded.

"I saw it done over a stretch that must have lasted two or three miles," Peanut replied. "How wide the strip was I couldn't say. But I saw hundreds of small trees fire-girdled at the base—trees as large as six inches in diameter, and in all that space I can't remember that I saw a single tiny tree, a seedling, coming up."

The other man shook his head. "What we don't know about taking care of our forests in America would fill a whole library," he said. "I have been interested in forestry ever since I bought a tract up in the Adirondacks. We do some pretty foolish things here in the North, but nothing quite so bad as to kill all new growth entirely—at least, not by

setting fires. Something you said in your story caught my eye Sunday. You said what these people should be pursued with are schools and roads, not guns. From the fact that their natural wealth seems to be timber, and they have neither the knowledge nor the facilities to market that timber, it strikes me that a forestry school in those mountains would be a valuable thing. What do you think about it?"

"Oh, sir, it would be the greatest thing that could be done!" Peanut cried.

"I think perhaps I will take a trip down to that region. Your friend, the rector, seems like a useful citizen. Suppose you give me his name and address."

Peanut did so, glad that he was thus the means of helping the man who had been so kind to him. Mr. Perkins shook hands with him when the interview was over, and thanked him for coming, with a simple courtesy quite unlike the brusque, domineering manners big New York financial magnates are supposed to have—and, we may add, generally do have.

Then the reporter departed, and walked up Nassau Street, between the tall buildings, in the great throng of people.

Nearly four months before he had walked down that street on his first assignment, feeling like an

insignificant atom in this vast city. Now he walked with head up, feeling that he had a place in it, and more than a place in it—a place in the scheme of American life. He realized that he wasn't a cub reporter any more, he was a newspaper man, possibly a magazine writer, too, or going to be one some day, with the power and influence which come from wielding a pen.

He paused in his walk, and thought.

"Oh, it's great to feel you can write about things and affect other people, and do some good in the world!" he exclaimed to himself.

Then he grew more sober. "But that means you've always got to be careful *what* you say, and be sure you're in the right," he added.

He grit his teeth. "I'm going to do my best always to be on the side of the under dog!" he said, half aloud this time, and then hurried back to the office for his evening assignment.

THE END

Stories for Boys and Girls

featuring

 **The DOG . . . The HORSE**
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